

# The Apostle Saul(Paul): *Single, Married, Divorced or Widowed?*

By Terry Newman, April 2012

What was Paul's status? The only place, which gives information, is at the time of his writings to the Congregation at Corinth, Paul himself acknowledged he was "unmarried" and he continued that way through his life and ministry. Now to discern whether or not Paul had ever been married and come to a logical conclusion, one must start by looking at the life, culture and customs of Paul's lifetime.

Judaism, historically, especially in the time of Paul, taught that marriage was normal and natural for adults. It was as a matter of fact considered to be an obligation as one of the 613 *laws of Moses*. Not being married, being an unmarried man was considered unnatural. The Talmud of which Paul was highly educated in also, teaches that an unmarried man is "incomplete". An unmarried man was lacking his *bashert*, his "soul-mate" (*Yebomoth 62b*). It was normal and expected for a young man to be married around eighteen years of age, if not some earlier. During this time, in the circles, which Paul was living, it would have been a disgrace, maybe even considered a curse not to be married.

Paul was highly and well educated. He studied in Jerusalem, a direct student of Gamaliel (considered one of the greatest Rabbis of Judaism). Paul identified himself as a Pharisee. Paul also was either an emissary/representative or a member of the Sanhedrin in his early years as he acted with their authority and blessings in the persecution of the Jews who had accepted Yeshua and knew him as the Messiah. Marriage was the normal and considered obligatory for the Pharisees and one could not be a member of the Sanhedrin if single. Paul described himself as seen in [Galatians 1:14](#) as being "more exceedingly zealous" in fulfilling and obeying the requirements of the law than his peers. Hence it is logical that Paul would have, through his zeal to obey the law and to be a "Hebrew of Hebrews" ([Philippians 3:5](#)), quite likely would have been married.

Considering the information above and that Paul was a man in his 30s when he came to know and accept Yeshua and began his three year process of learning about the Messiah and the message of the Good News of the Kingdom and was on a mission to arrest Jewish believers in the Messiah, Yeshua, it is only a common sense, logical conclusion that Paul at that time or prior to that time was married.

Examining Paul's writings to the Corinthians should give us some additional information concerning his marital status or rather his possible previous marital status.

Researching the texts, I found the following:

[1 Corinthians 7:8](#): "*I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.*" With saying "even as I am," Paul, in no uncertain terms makes it clear he is unmarried at this time. Here Paul is addressing the "unmarried" and "widows", admonishing them to stay unmarried if at all possible.

[1 Corinthians 9:5](#): "*Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?*" Here Paul is exhorting the right to be married, to have them along with them in the ministry and to expect to be taken care of by the congregations. But Paul renounces those for himself: "I have used none of these things." ([1Corinthians 9:15](#)) Therefore Paul does once again indicates he is "unmarried" at the time of his writing this and he sustains himself through his trade (tent making).

In these texts, the word "unmarried" is translated from the Greek word *agamos*. This word in Greek literature refers specifically to an unmarried male, bachelor or widower. *Agamos* appears four times, all used by Paul and in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians. It appears that Paul uses the *agamos*

referencing those who are married or have been married but are no longer married. (1 Corinthians 7:1-24)

There is a Greek word for “widower”, *cheros*. However it does not appear in biblical literature, hence Paul might possibly use *agamos* in its place. Also *agamos* seems to be the masculine word for someone who has lost a spouse, as in 1 Corinthians 7:8 where Paul’s use of *agamos* parallels “widows”. Here it appears Paul is addressing both men and women who have been married, but have lost their spouse.

In 1 Corinthians 7:25-40, it appears Paul is now addressing those who have never been married, as virgins. This separate term also is a strong indication Paul used the term *agamos* for those once married, of which he identifies himself with.

Where does that leave us with Paul? Single (Bachelor), Married, Divorced or Widowed. We can rule out married at the time he wrote to the congregation at Corinth. But, what about his time prior to his writing to the Corinth congregation?

From the facts of Paul’s life previously, it is a logical case that Paul was at one time married, but is not at the time of his writing to the Corinth congregation. However that does not explain why he would not be married now. That would be speculation. But there are two likely possibilities to the reason.

1. At some point Paul lost his wife to death and therefore he would be a widower.
2. When Paul came to know Yeshua the Messiah, his wife did not agree with his “sudden” life change, or believe herself and left him, which even according to his (Paul’s) own counsel, if a believer has an unbelieving spouse who leaves and wants a divorce, give the divorce.

Having been married before, gives even more credence to the counsel Paul has regarding marriage. In his counsel he is compassionate, loving and understanding of the problems, something that only comes with experience. This would have made the counsel more acceptable to the congregations then and should also today.

Therefore, while I believed through the writings, that Paul was or had possibly been married as I was going by 1 Corinthians 9:5, I had not fully tied in the rest of the texts to get the entire picture. I had my conclusion the same, but for the wrong reasons. Now I have researched and gone through the entire text concerning this area.

I still hold to the thought that Paul was once married and for whatever reason, at the time of his writing to the Corinth congregation, he was no longer married and continued to stay unmarried the rest of his life. However I now have the entire picture and information after researching the subject.

Therefore I base my conclusion that the Apostle Paul had been married earlier in his life on the above, first outlined facts.