

The Charismatics
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Feb 12, 2018

1 Cor 7:7

(NA 27th ed.)

(NIV)

θέλω δὲ πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἶναι ὡς καὶ ἐμαυτόν· I wish that all of you were as I am.
ἀλλὰ ἕκαστος ἴδιον ἔχει χάρισμα ἐκ θεοῦ, But each of you has your own gift from God;
ὁ μὲν οὕτως, ὁ δὲ οὕτως. one has this gift, another has that.

Note how NIV does not directly translate *anthropos*, “men.” Instead, it aptly renders the gender neutral “all of you.” In line 2, note *idios* for “your own.” Think “idiosyncrasy” or “idiot.” You may discern “charismatic” in *charisma*, “gift”—which is “from God.” Note the near and far demonstratives in NIV line 3 (“this” and “that”)—a good rendering of Greek which repeats the same word. Also, note that NIV inserts the word “gift” into line 3, with no Greek counterpart. This is done to make the sense clear, but could be confusing if you haplessly wasted time looking for a *charisma* in line 3! Remember that a dynamic equivalent translation gives you the sense of the verse, without a necessary word-for-word correspondence. For example, line 1 in NLT reads, “But I wish everyone were single, just as I am.”

Paul is discussing his marital status as a model for Christians. He commends singlehood, but also is somewhat favorable to marriage. Each state is a *charisma* of God. He counsels singles that despite the advantages of singleness, if they can’t control their lustful impulses (my phrasing) they should marry (1 Cor 7:9).

Whatever state you are in is the particular *charisma* that you have from God at this point in time. If you are single, then by definition you possess the gift of singleness right now. In my opinion, that *charisma* is not the ability to be content or happy being single, it is the simple fact of being single.

(Imagine someone complaining that they are married, but they don't have the "gift" of marriage, meaning the ability to be content with their spouse. How would you counsel such a person? In the same way, I think it is misguided for a single person to complain that they don't have the "gift of singleness" as if that is the psychological disposition to be content as a single.)

We are all called to embrace the *charisma* that God has given us. But this is hard and takes faith and effort. Half of the *charismatics* in counselor's offices are single people who want to be married—but the other half are married people who want to be single. We must learn to be content with—and even revel in—our own particular gift from God, whether this or that.

The better the *charisma* is, the more prone we are to make an idol out of it. There is no gift in this material world better than a good marriage, so we are constantly tempted to invest it with the ability to make us happy or secure or fulfilled. We are deceived if we expect from a marriage what only the eternal God can give. In marriage one experiences an echo of love between Christ and his church (Eph 5:32). But the ideal and consummate state of all Christians in the resurrection will be celibate (Matt 22:30); singles experience an echo of this ahead of time.

This is one of the most difficult things about living the Christian life. Many single people deeply long for a spouse, and can't avoid this ache and ever-present pain. Unhappy married people deeply yearn to be free of their spouse. If not in these ways, all of us struggle in some related way or other. We have to learn where our blessedness actually is located. In this present life, our solace is in our relationship with a loving Savior. He is really there and really does care about us. (This is easy for a person in a good marriage to say. It can be hard to hold on to when one is very unhappy.)

And we also know that in the end we will be with Jesus always, and we can look forward to that. So let us practice deeply yearning for him in whatever state we find ourselves, whether this one or that.

Amen, Come Lord Jesus.