

## Paul's Marital Status: Celibate or Married?

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The question of whether the apostle Paul was married has been speculated upon and debated for a long time. This brief essay seeks to settle the matter once and for all. To arrive at our conclusion, we shall reference pertinent Pauline Bible texts as well as the inspired writings of Ellen G. White.

In White's book *The Acts of the Apostles*, we read: "After the death of Stephen, Saul was elected a member of the Sanhedrin council in consideration of the part he had acted on that occasion. For a time he was a mighty instrument in the hands of Satan to carry out his rebellion against the Son of God. But soon this relentless persecutor was to be employed in building up the church that he was now tearing down. A Mightier than Satan had chosen Saul to take the place of the martyred Stephen, to preach and suffer for His name, and to spread far and wide the tidings of salvation through His blood" (AA 102).

Mrs. White says further: "He was not a member of the Sanhedrim [var.] council until after the death of Stephen, when he was elected to that body in consideration of the part he had acted on that occasion" (3SP 300, in SR 267). What is more, "His elevation to membership in the Sanhedrin council placed him in a position of power" (AA 112).

Some commentators have assumed that Paul's comment, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor. 7:1), concerns celibacy. To this he adds: "I say . . . to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I" (v. 8). In the overall context of the principles of marriage discussed in this chapter, however, Paul's expressions show (a) that the bond of marriage is a hedge against fornication, and (b) that his *present state* was that of a single man.

Let us excerpt from the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* regarding the Pauline expressions quoted above from the seventh chapter of First Corinthians:

According to Acts 26:10 Paul gave his voice against the saints [having "received authority from the chief priests"], which has been interpreted to mean that he was a member of the Sanhedrin (cf. AA 112). Members of that body were required to be married (see Talmud *Sanhedrin* 36b, Soncino, ed., vol. 1, p. 229; cf. DA 133). Furthermore, it is most natural to assume that Paul, as a strict Pharisee, would not have neglected what the Jews regarded as a sacred obligation, namely marriage (see Mishnah *Yebamoth* 6.6, Soncino, ed. of the Talmud, vol. 1, p. 111). His detailed counsel in this chapter suggests an intimate acquaintance with problems such as marriage would provide. There seems to be little doubt, therefore, that sometime prior to the writing of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul had been married.—6BC 707

Taking this understanding into account, we now proceed with further comments from the inspired pen of Mrs. White. "While still a young man, he [Saul of Tarsus] became an honored member of the Sanhedrin. He was looked upon as a man of promise, a zealous defender of the ancient faith" (Ed 64).

The preaching of John [the Baptist] had taken so deep a hold on the nation as to

demand the attention of the religious authorities. The danger of insurrection caused every popular gathering to be looked upon with suspicion by the Romans, and whatever pointed toward an uprising of the people excited the fears of the Jewish rulers. John had not recognized the authority of the Sanhedrin by seeking their sanction for his work; and he had reproved rulers and people, Pharisees and Sadducees alike. Yet the people followed him eagerly. The interest in his work seemed to be continually increasing. Though he had not deferred to them, the Sanhedrin accounted that, as a public teacher, he was under their jurisdiction.

This body was made up of members chosen from the priesthood, and from the chief rulers and teachers of the nation. The high priest was usually the president. All its members were to be men advanced in years, though not aged; men of learning, not only versed in Jewish religion and history, but in general knowledge. They were to be without physical blemish, and must be married men, and fathers, as being more likely than others to be humane and considerate. Their place of meeting was an apartment connected with the temple at Jerusalem. In the days of Jewish independence the Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the nation, possessing secular as well as ecclesiastical authority. Though now subordinated by the Roman governors, it still exercised a strong influence in civil as well as religious matters.—DA 133

Based on the foregoing comments, my conclusion is that Paul was not only married at one time but had at least one child. We are left to speculate on what happened to his family, since nothing on them appears in accounts we regard as inspired, whether in the greater light of Scripture or the lesser light of Ellen White's Spirit of Prophecy legacy.