

# **SINGLE AND LEGIT**

## **1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-40**

Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.

I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress - that it is good for a man to remain as he is: are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.

But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.

But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord - how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world - how he may please his wife.

There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world - how she may please her husband.

And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. 38 So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.

A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment - and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

There's a sentiment in some families - even in some churches - that if a 35 or 40 year old Christian is still single there must be a problem. Sadly, single Christians are often viewed as **“unfinished business.”**

*A single man gets passed over for leadership. A single woman is seen as less mature than a wife or mom. It's assumed the preferred state of all Christians is marriage.*

*What mother doesn't want to see her son or daughter happily married?... What father doesn't expect to see his son settle down - find a wife and start a life? This is what provokes the*

following kinds of comments at the family reunion... *“Oh, it’s too bad you’re not married yet?”*

*“How is a nice girl like you still single?”*

*“What that boy really needs is a good wife.”*

*“Hey, are you dating someone?”*

*“I’m praying the Lord leads you to the right person.”*

Often, in a Christian family, or in the church, the single member feels like he or she is on the outside looking in.

They can feel ostracized and misunderstood. On occasion singles get hurt and discouraged by insensitive comments from other Christians. They get victimized by a prejudice that’s far more *cultural* than it is *biblical*...

Jesus never said if you commit your life to Him, He’ll bless you with a spouse and children of your own.

Jesus promises us an *“abundant life”* - but nowhere does He specify it as a *“married life.”* The mere numbers suggest that *“single”* will be the expected status for some Christians. *There’re more women in the world than men.*

Sometimes, a Christian’s circumstances keeps him or her single. Sometimes, singleness is a personal choice... But as the Church we need to recognize singleness as a legitimate status for fellow Christians.

If you’ve been here for the last three lessons in 1 Corinthians 7 you realize that *Paul is pro-marriage.*

He suggests that the natural course for young men and women is to mature, then marry, then make babies.

And I'm serious when I say it, *we need more babies... at least, more babies growing up in Christian homes.*

But that's not to say that an equally legitimate course for Christians is to forego marriage and stay singly devoted to Jesus. *Paul is also pro-single.* Today's text sanctions singleness and celibacy as legitimate choices for a Christian. Paul is also an advocate for single living.

Remember, 1 Corinthians 7-16 is Paul's response to a serious of questions asked of him by the Corinthians.

The believers in Corinth weren't the sweet, goody-two-shoe kids who went to Christian school and sowed their wild oats by toilet-papering the youth pastor's house.

No, you could call this church "*the wild bunch.*"

They were former thieves, and drunks, and prostitutes, and idolaters, and sodomites. They were more accustomed to bar-fights and one-night stands than they were church meetings. The believers in Corinth had zero Christian influence in their life other than Paul and his pals...

But now they'd been washed - they were sanctified - they were justified. They were new creations in Christ!

They knew it in their hearts, they just didn't know how to live it out. So they write to Paul with lots of questions.

And in Chapter 7 he deals with those that relate to relationships... *to marriage, divorce, and singleness.*

So far he's talked about *sex in marriage*, and *reasons for divorce*, and *staying where we've been called*... Now Paul answers their questions about faith and singleness.

In verse 25 Paul begins, “**Now concerning virgins...**”

The Greek word Paul uses is “**parthenos.**” It refers to a young woman who’s never had sex with a man.

Here Paul uses the term as a synonym for “*single,*” since it was expected of single people in Paul’s day to be virgins. *Sadly, in our day, that’s seldom the case...*

In a 2003 survey, men and women were asked, “**When does sex with your date become acceptable?**”

A whopping 44% of men and 8% of women answered, “**On the first, second, or third date.**” 20% of men and 18% of women answered, “**After three or more dates.**”

While 22% of men and 45% of women replied, “**After knowing the person for an extended period of time.**”

But a mere 5% of men and 15% of women answered, “**Only after getting married.**” And that helps to explain the climate single Christians find themselves in today.

Today, sex is expected. The idea of reserving your sexuality for the person God chooses for you to marry is as archaic as a rotary telephone, or a vinyl record.

Yet realize, God hasn’t changed His instructions! The Bible doesn’t need upgrading. God’s truth is timeless.

God still expects both single and married Christians to remain sexually pure. *If you’re married* remain faithful to your spouse. *If you’re single,* you may get married in the future, so remain faithful to your spouse in advance.

Sex is sacred and special. It impacts us on the deepest level. Sexual activity creates spiritual bonds.

Our fidelity protects our psyche and self-worth.

Paul wrote in 6:18 that sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. It's spiritual suicide. Every time you give yourself away to be used by someone else it eats away at your self-worth. It diminishes your dignity.

No wonder we're an injured and hurting society.

Obey God and you won't be disappointed. Ignore Him at your own risk. Recently, Anne Widdecombe, a former British politician has written, "Let's face it, we are not a happier society as a result of the sexual liberalization."

We have record rates of divorce, record rates of suicide, record rates of teenage pregnancy, record rates of youth crime, record rates of underage sex. We should invite people to recognize that the Great Experiment has failed. You cannot have happiness without restraint."

Virgins or not, if Paul were writing today, he'd begin verse 25, "*Now concerning singles...*" And understand the revolutionary nature of this designation. In antiquity almost everyone married. There were few single people.

Whereas today, singles make up more than half the population... In 1950 22% of Americans were single.

Today, for the first time in American history there are more singles than married - 50.2%, or 124.6 million American adults, are single. Paul's words are as relevant today as they've been at any other time in our history.

Paul is writing to single Christians, "*Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as*

one whom the Lord in His mercy *has made trustworthy.*” We mentioned this earlier in Chapter 7, Paul is asked a question the Gospels never address. Thus, he can’t quote the Lord Jesus chapter and verse.

Be assured, Paul isn’t *abdicating* his authority to write Holy Spirit inspired Scripture, he’s just *indicating* that he’s tackling a subject Jesus never dealt with directly.

And he assures the Corinthians that what he writes can be trusted. God in his mercy made Paul trustworthy.

He continues, “*I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress - that it is good for a man to remain as he is: Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.*” Notice, Paul doesn’t exalt one state above the other. If you’re married *stay so* - it’s good to be married. *But here’s the revolutionary thought...* If you’re single *stay so* - it’s also good to be single.

In the ancient world no one would’ve made such a statement. Singleness would’ve been interpreted as a curse to avoid, not a blessing you’d want to embrace.

*And for the rest of this chapter Paul is going to extol the virtues of singleness...* If you’re a single Christian these verses will provide *much hope and great help.*

And if you’re married, *you didn’t make a mistake.*

We know from the entirety of the NT that Paul saw great value in marriage. But because of the current events in Corinth - what he calls “*the present distress*” - he believes marriage has some disadvantages.



What was *“the present distress?”* *We’re not sure.*

Historians tell us there were famine conditions and food shortages in 50 AD in areas around Corinth. This would’ve created civil unrest - even riots in the street.

Some Bible expositors believe Paul was anticipating a coming persecution. History confirms in the decade following fiery trials were orchestrated by Caesar Nero.

Both scenarios made life difficult for a Christian, especially one who was married and had children.

This is what Paul tells us in verse 28, *“But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.”*

Ladies, think of what it would’ve been like had you been alive at the time and married to the Apostle Paul.

A day at the office for your hubby included preaching to an angry mob - followed by a potential stoning, or flogging. It was as likely for him to end up in a prison, as it was for him to make it home for dinner at night.

And rather than take you on trips, and get bumped to first class, Paul’s travel often ended in shipwreck. *If Paul had been married his wife would’ve been a wreck!*

Marriage is never easy, but for a caring lady to be married to a man like Paul it would’ve been torture.

*Think of an imaginary Mrs. Paul’s complaints, “Honey, can you stop tracking blood onto the carpet...”*

*“Sweetheart, would you talk to your angel about breaking you out of jail so you can be home earlier...”*



*“Baby, I was thinking a ministry to moms not mobs.”*

Seriously, *Voice Of The Martyrs* founder, Richard Wurmbrand, once told the story of a fellow Christian pastor who was persecuted by the communists.

They tortured this man in an attempt to get him to deny Christ, instead he stood firm in his faith... *until...*

His 14 year-old son was brought into the room.

The communists beat the boy unmercifully. The poor pastor finally broke down, and verbally renounced his faith in Christ... *It was his son, what was he to do...*

We think of this as a theoretical situation we hope to never face. But there are believers today in Iraq, and in Syria, and in Egypt, and in Sudan, and in Afghanistan, and in Indonesia where this is their daily reality.

Christians have been beheaded by Isis. And worse, their wives and daughters are raped and sold as sex slaves. It's been noted, *"A man who is a hero himself is a coward when he thinks of his wife and children."*

A married man is vulnerable in a way he wouldn't be if he were single. Due to this *“present distress,”* Paul tells the Corinthians they're better off not marrying.

He instructs them, if you're married stay married, and pray for protection and grace - but if you're not married, consider it a blessing. You have a lesser liability.

But *“the present distress”* was not the only issue that concerned Paul. In verse 29 he says we're running out of time... *“But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from*

now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away.”

Paul contends that *“time is short.”* Obviously, he believed Jesus was coming at any moment. And every generation of believers, since the first century onward should live their days on Earth under this assumption.

Prophetically speaking, nothing needs to happen before Jesus comes as a thief in the night, to whisk away His Church. Never forget, our snatching away is imminent! It can happen at any time - *even today!*

And this is how Paul lived his life. He’d streamlined his concerns so his only care was Christ and people.

And he encourages married Christians to do the same. *“Those who have wives should be as though they had none...”* Now some guys read this verse, and shout, *“Free at last. I’ve found my favorite verse. As though they had none... I’m playing golf every day this week, and going deer hunting next weekend.”* *Whoa... hold your horses big fellow!* That’s not what it means.

Paul is in no way suggesting a married person can abandon their family and their marital responsibilities.

I’ve known people and some pastors who use their commitment to Christ as an excuse for neglecting their families. That is not what Paul is advocating here.

And perhaps more so, I've seen married people use their marriage and family as an excuse for neglecting their commitment to God and to their church. Young couples can get so wrapped up in themselves, and in their kids, and in all the kids do, that they put their church, and their service to God, on the back burner.

This is why Paul tells married folk to *“be as though they had (no spouse.)”* In other words, don't put your family ahead of your service to God and His calling!

*Do you really think getting your child to a twelve year old's baseball game is more important than your church, and the ministry to which God calls you? What are we teaching our kids about the proper priorities?*

Kathy and I raised four kids, and we gave them all kinds of opportunities, but there were limits. *God came first!* Church was a given - and not because I was the pastor. *We honored God with our weekly worship.*

Our kids knew their family was part of something greater than ourselves. The Adams family exists to serve God - God doesn't exist just to better our family.

Christians should never stop loving and serving our spouse and kids, but neither should we worship them.

You can turn your family into an idol. Some Christian couples are so busy providing for each other, and their children, they never make a sacrifice for anyone else!

Some Christians *focus on the family* too much.

I've witnessed couples who while dating were always at church. Perhaps they met at church; but the moment they

married we never saw them again... Or once their kids started signing up for stuff, they disappeared...

*The point of marriage is to serve the Lord together! The goal of a family needs to be the glory of God.*

And here Paul is saying when it comes to serving God, believers who have a family shouldn't be any less diligent toward the things of God than those who don't.

Paul goes on to say, in that same way that you shouldn't let your life be dominated by family concerns, neither should you get bogged down by emotions...

*“Those who weep (should be) as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice...”* Sorrow or gladness can overwhelm us. In life we go through seasons of intense emotions that either *shut down our caring* or *snuff out our usefulness*.

Christians can get distracted by moods and feelings.

In 2013 Nick Saban and his Alabama football team beat Notre Dame 42-14 for the national title. It was Alabama's second championship in as many seasons.

When the game was over, sportscaster, Tom Rinaldi, stuck the microphone in Nick Saban's face, and asked the coach how long he planned to enjoy the victory.

Saban said, *“Well, two days and we're going to start on next year. We've got a 24-hour rule around here... but I'm proud of these guys, man. I'm happy for them.”*

Given back-to-back championships, how nice it was for ole Coach Nick to stretch his one-day rule, and let his guys celebrate for a full 48 hours. *What a softy!*

Yet Paul had the same down-to-business attitude toward serving God. When he won victories, Paul gave himself very little time to revel in them. He'd agree with the quote, "We'll have all eternity to celebrate our victories, but just a few short days to win them."

And Paul felt the same way about his sorrows. He had no time to refill his victory mug, and he had no time to cry over spilt milk. Dry your tears, and stop your cheers, the battle isn't over. There's more to be done!

And he wasn't about to let his zeal get *snuffed* by material stuff. Paul adds, "(And) *those who buy (should be) as though they did not possess...*" Paul would tell you, "Possessions are fine, if they don't possess you."

Everybody needs some stuff to get by in life - a car, a house, a refrigerator. Just don't fall in love with your fridge, and spend inordinate amounts of time in front of your refrigerator. *Maybe a better illustration is your TV.*

But Paul's point is that time is short - use it wisely!

Have you seen the Tikker watch? After inputting your data, it estimates your life expectancy. Whenever you check to see what time it is you're reminded of how many years, and months, and days, and hours, and minutes, and seconds you have left to live.

Here's the Tikker motto, "Every moment counts."

You'd think the constant reminder of your demise would get depressing, but its inventor, Fredrik Colting, a former gravedigger, calls it "the happiness watch."

He believes watching your life tick away reminds you to enjoy and savor every second you've been given. The Apostle Paul would probably wear a Tikker.

And then he writes in verse 32, "But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord - how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world - how he may please *his wife*." A single person is free from "*the present distress*," but he's also free from *distraction*.

Think back, before Tiger Woods was married - prior to his infamous womanizing... when all we thought of the young man, was here is a truly great golfer...

In 2002 I read an interview with Tiger's dad, Earl Woods, about his son's abilities and prospects for success. Earl made a controversial statement...

He commented, "I don't see Tiger marrying before 30, if then, because he has a lot to accomplish in the game of golf. And, let's face it, a wife can sometimes be a deterrent to a good game of golf. The level Tiger's at, the finite little problems like that would destroy him."

Well, I hate to say it, but Daddy Earl was right!

Tiger's sin became public knowledge, his marriage unraveled, and he's never been the same golfer since.

As every married man who enjoys playing golf more than checking off items on a honey-do list will tell you, "A wife can



sometimes be a deterrent to a good game of golf.” Here, ole Earl sounds like the Apostle Paul.

A married man has a tough time concentrating and keeping his focus on God (*or his golf game*), because he’s also attending to the needs of his wife and kids.

If you’ve heard this story before just ignore it, *but it fits the context here...* I once was officiating a wedding ceremony in this very spot. The sanctuary was packed. The couple getting married had made it to the altar.

That’s when yours truly opened his mouth...

Ole Pastor Sandy meant to said, “*Just as the wife complements the husband...*” But those are not the words that came out of my mouth. Instead I said, “*Just as the wife complicates the husband.*” Hey, condemn me for inappropriate timing, but not for untruthfulness.

For here Paul agrees. Marriage complicates a life.

When a man gets married, suddenly he has double the trouble... *two sets of car repairs, two insurance premiums to pay, two birthdays to remember, two opinions to sort through, two demands on his time...*

If I weren’t married I’d never hang Christmas lights...

Think of all the money I’d save not writing checks to the Nail Gallery... I’d never purchase another tube of lipstick - or have to call home when I was running late.

I could spend all my time serving the Lord, and witnessing to people... *on the golf course if I wanted!*

This past week Kathy went to Columbus to see Natalie and



the grand-babies. She was gone for three days, and I got so much work done - a ton of work.

Even watched the Hawks and played a little golf.

I don't know what it is, but without a wife around my life becomes more focused and streamlined. *I park in Kathy's spot, closer to the house. I don't have to shave, brush teeth, bathe. I work in the living room...*

Now, don't get me wrong after a few days I start to miss her and want her home. *My focus* isn't worth *her absence*. But when she's gone it reminds me just how much a married man cares for the things of the world.

Before I got married I thought I was an unselfish guy. I'd go out on a date, and be on my best behavior - I'd put my best unselfish foot forward - then I'd come home and unwind exactly the way I wanted.

Then I got married, and immediately I realized this was the date that didn't end. I was expected to always be on my best behavior. You never got to fully unwind. I started to learn what it really meant to be unselfish.

Then one kid came along... then two... make that three... even four. And with each kid my unselfishness stretched. I learned new capacities of unselfishness.

I've learned how true it is, *"he who is married cares about the things of the world - how he may please his wife."* That's a good thing. Marriage teaches selfish people how to please others, *but it also restricts a person's spontaneity, and autonomy, and freedom.*

Verse 34 puts it, “There is a difference between a wife and a virgin (or single person). The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.” A single gal isn’t following a husband. She’s free to serve the Lord.

She’s not worried about what a man might think of her appearance, nor about ministering to his fleshly needs. Her focus is on the Lord and His will for her life.

A married woman is in a three-legged race with an clumsy husband stepping on her toes... While a single lady’s life is a beautiful dance with Jesus Himself...

In contrast to the bliss of singleness, Paul sums up the life of a Mrs... “But she who is married cares about the things of the world - how she may please *her* husband.” *A wife’s chief concern is pleasing her man!*

Wow, I’m sure every husband would testify his wife’s big concern is “*pleasing her husband.*” *It might not always seem to be the case, but surely that’s the idea!*

Then Paul adds, verse 35, “And this (the “*this*” is the legitimacy of singleness) I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.”

In Ephesians 5 Paul depicts marriage as a beautiful love story. *But here Paul isn’t as romantic.* If you’re single beware, and if you choose to marry know what you’re getting into... In verse 35 Paul’s picture of marriage is not so flattering - marriage is a “*leash.*”

It’s a dog collar that curtails your freedom. That’s a bit

harsh, but it's true. Marriage limits a person's autonomy. A married person is accountable for his time, and whereabouts, and behavior, and even attitude, not just to God, but now to another human.

There's a reason we call marriage, "getting hitched."

As one author writes, "I didn't know what happiness was until I got married, but by then it was too late." *Aw, that's just a joke.* Hey, I am very happily married. I have a wife who trusts me, and lets me follow the Lord.

But I realize marriage is a trade-off. She and I are swapping some freedom and independence for trust and companionship. I'm not as free as a single man...

*I can't just up and take a job in another state for a few years... I can't stay out all night without explaining why... I can't take money out the account to spend it on myself... or be late without offering a notification...*

Even my desires to serve the Lord have to be balanced with the needs of my family. Neither spouse should act independently of the other. Married folks are no longer playing singles, but doubles. You're a team.

If you've ever played tennis you know the difference between singles and doubles... In doubles tennis you don't have to run as much. You can cover more of the court. There's more strategy in the doubles game.

But I hated doubles! There're also disadvantages. Why should I be penalized for my partner's mistakes.

And when you have a partner you've got to learn to think alike, and cooperate, and work together. It's just a lot simpler

and there're less worries playing singles.

This is what Paul is saying about marriage. We're all Christians - *we're tennis players, so to speak*. We're called to **serve**. We start with **love**. We're all playing tennis, *but has God called you to be a singles player, or a doubles player?* Both have their advantages...

Paul has more questions to answer in verse 36. Here he seems to no longer be addressing his comments to the virgin (or single person), but to the virgin's father.

**“But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.”**

In ancient culture - even in non-western cultures today - the father, or patriarch of the family, had a say in the marriage of his children.

When I was a single young man this was a concept I couldn't wrap my brain around. I would never want my parents telling me who and when I should marry.

Well, after raising four kids, this idea is no longer as preposterous to me as it once seemed. Thankfully, my three married kids have chosen wisely, but after a couple of near misses, I now understand why parents were once involved. The ancients were pretty smart!

In Corinth it was a father who chose his daughter's *mate*, and their *date*... And here Paul is saying to the dads if your princess is aging, if her best years are fleeting, if you're holding her back, and she wants to marry - then let her! There's nothing wrong with a gal getting marriage... **“He does**

*not sin; let them marry.”*

Verse 37, “Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he who gives *her* in marriage does well, but he who does not give *her* in marriage does better.” Again, Paul sticks to the theme he’s been trumpeting throughout this passage.

Because of “*the present distress*” and “*the distracting cares of marriage,*” if a person has the self-control and God-given calling to live solo and be singly devoted to Jesus - great, he or she is better off unmarried.

Did you hear about the wedding at the bride’s house? It started at 6:45, but the host forgot one detail.

Just as the pastor popped the question, “*Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?*” - a little bird slid from the mouth of the clock just overhead, and sounded, “*cuckoo, cuckoo*” - seven hilarious *cuckoos*.

And that sums up Paul’s take on marriage!

If you’re not called to marriage - if you don’t need it - then why be cuckoo and forego your freedom? Serve God without distractions. Be single for the Savior!

In conclusion Paul answers a last question in verses 39-40, that obviously dealt with singles who were formerly married, but were now widows or widowers.

He states, “*A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.*”

A spouse's death frees their spouse from any marital obligations. He or she is free to remarry as long as it's *"in the Lord"* - which means to another Christian.

And yet Paul even adds a caveat here, *"But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment - and I think I also have the Spirit of God."*

Once more, for reasons stated earlier, unless God has called her to remarry, she might be happier single. Like the credit card, singleness has its privileges.

God calls some of us to be single - others to marry.

Our job is to **bloom where we're planted**. Whatever your status, do all that you do to the glory of God!