

# FIRST CORINTHIANS

## Chapter 7:25-40

### Introduction

There was a single's ministry in the church at Corinth. The question all these unmarried Christians had was this: "Should we remain single?"

Paul answered their *question* by describing a *quality* they should all desire to maintain. He told them in verse thirty-two they should "care for the things that belong to the Lord – how you may please the Lord," and in verse thirty-five, "that you may serve the Lord without distraction." In other words, whether they remained single or not, they should desire to maintain a **single-mindedness** toward serving the Lord.

To be single-minded means to *have one overriding purpose or goal*; it means to be *steadfast*. We might use the word *focused* today; stay focused on the Lord. Whether you remain single or not depends on whether or not you have a gift of celibacy. If you don't, you should get married. But either way you should have as your one overriding goal and purpose in life to remain steadfast and focused on serving your Lord.

You will specifically see two things in these verses: #1 If You Can Remain Single You Are Able To Remain Single-Minded In Serving Your Lord, and #2 If You Can't Remain Single You Are Enabled To Remain Single-Minded In Serving Your Lord.

#1 If You Can Remain Single You Are Able To  
Remain Single-Minded In Serving Your Lord  
(v25-35)

Paul's simple and straightforward advice to Christians who are unmarried is to remain single. If you can remain single, you will minimize the distractions and cares that could interfere with your serving Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 7:25 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.

The “virgin” is a person who has not been sexually active and has never been married. Later he uses the word “unmarried,” which can describe someone who was once married but is now divorced. He speaks to and about both single men and single women.

Jesus gave no direct teaching on singleness. Paul is giving it here as his “judgment,” writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His perspective is authoritative – but it is *not* a commandment. He is *not* commanding them to remain single.

1 Corinthians 7:26 I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that *it is* good for a man to remain as he is:

The “man” in this verse is an unmarried man. We are dealing with Christian singles – both men and women. They got saved and found themselves single – whether they had never been married or had been divorced.

It is “good” to remain single “because of the present distress.” We frankly don’t know what the present distress was in Corinth. We believe that Paul was probably anticipating the coming Roman persecution upon the church. Rome had already begun persecuting Jews. When Paul first arrived in Corinth he met Aquilla and Priscilla. They were Jews who had been expelled from Rome because the emperor Claudius had issued orders commanding all Jews to depart (Acts 18:1). The Romans thought of Christianity as a Jewish sect, so Paul knew persecution against the church was coming. In fact, less than ten years after Paul wrote, Nero began his terrible persecution against Christians. One of the first recorded Christian martyrs was Erastus – a man from Corinth.

Taking all of this into consideration, it was “good” for a man or a woman to remain single. They would thereby avoid much suffering.

1 Corinthians 7:27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

Paul reiterates a principle he had laid down in verse twenty-four: Remain with God in the calling in which you were called. If you are

married, remain married. We looked at remaining married in the first part of this chapter. If you are unmarried – remain single if you can.

I keep saying “if you can” or “if you can’t.” This is something we learned last week as well. You can only remain single if you have the gift of celibacy. If you don’t, you **can’t** remain single and should get married.

1 Corinthians 7:28 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.

Paul is careful to point out that neither singleness or marriage is either more or less spiritual. It is spiritual to find and follow God’s will for your life. But if you *can* remain single, you will be spared “trouble in the flesh.” “Trouble” means *pressed together or under pressure*. Marriage presses two sinners close together in situations that create great stresses and pressures. Is marriage bad? No; but it does involve conflicts, demands, hardships, sacrifices, and adjustments that remaining single avoids. There are troubles unique to singleness; but they are exceeded by the troubles in marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:29 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,

“Time” is a word that refers to a definite period of time. In just a short period of time persecution would break out upon Christians. This context gives you the true interpretation of “even those who have wives should be as though you have none.” Paul doesn’t mean that those who were married should act as if they were not married. He means that persecution was coming that could potentially separate husbands and wives. It would be “as though you had” no wife or husband – *except that you **did** have one*, and so you would suffer more than a single Christian.

Being married entangles you in other ways that remaining single avoids:

1 Corinthians 7:30 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,  
1 Corinthians 7:31 and those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away.

Regarding weeping, it's not that single Christians have no one they care about enough to weep for... But they *don't* have a spouse or family to care about or weep for.

Regarding rejoicing, it's not that single Christians have no recreations... But they *don't* have a spouse or family that needs regularly scheduled outings and vacations which, though necessary and good, nevertheless take up time and resources that could otherwise be dedicated to serving the Lord.

The same is true of possessions and getting caught-up in the world. The single Christian can have a much lighter contact with the world which is, after all, "passing away."

1 Corinthians 7:32 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.

1 Corinthians 7:33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife.

Simply stated, being married increases your "cares about the things of the world." If you can remain single, you can remain single-minded in "how [you] may please the Lord."

1 Corinthians 7:34 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.

Remember: It is *not* more spiritual to remain single. But, on a practical basis, you have more time to devote to the "things of the Lord." To be "holy both in body and in spirit" means to be more fully set apart for the work of the Lord. You'll simply have more time and energy – both mentally and physically – to set aside for God.

1 Corinthians 7:35 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.

The word "leash" means *restraint*. Paul is not restraining your freedom. You can remain single; you can get married. It is up to you.

If you can remain single, "you may serve the Lord without distraction." Without distraction has the idea of waiting alongside the Lord and serving with Him. It is the quality of being single-minded. If you can remain single, you can more easily remain single-minded.

While we are on the subject of unmarried Christians, look at verses thirty-nine and forty:

1 Corinthians 7:39 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.

1 Corinthians 7:40 But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

Widows are the subject of these verses. Marriage is a lifetime covenant of companionship between a man and a woman. You are “bound” to remain married. If your husband dies – or your wife, for that matter – as a widow or widower, you are free to remarry. The one restriction is that you must marry “only in the Lord.” You **must** marry a Christian.

In the Pastoral Epistles Paul urges younger widows to marry. His advice here is probably to older widows – those over sixty years of age. If you can, remain single.

What if you can’t remain single because you don’t have the gift of celibacy? Is marriage a curse upon your serving the Lord? Are you doomed to marry and lose focus?

## #2 If You Can’t Remain Single You Are Enabled To Remain Single-Minded In Serving Your Lord (v36-38)

Singleness does not guarantee great devotion to Jesus Christ. Neither does marriage prevent you from serving the Lord. I could not even imagine being a pastor and teacher of the Word without being married and without having children. A loving, devoted spiritual family is a great source of joy and strength both to the family members and all those their lives come into contact with.

Paul encouraged believers to stay married in the first half of this chapter. He pointed out that marriage was in itself a wonderful, spiritual ministry – a place to serve the Lord. If you can’t remain single, then you can expect God to enable you to handle marriage *and* serving the Lord.

Paul addresses “a man and his virgin” in these three verses:

1 Corinthians 7:36 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.

We can't be sure exactly who Paul is talking to. The words he uses can be applied to either father's and their daughters, or to engaged couples:

1. In Jewish and Roman cultures, the father played a significant role in arranging and giving permission for marriage. It could be that Paul is addressing Christian fathers who had made a vow when their daughters were young to not give them in marriage.
2. It may be engaged couples that Paul is addressing. Persecution was coming; should they break off their engagement? Or should they get married?

Most likely Paul is addressing fathers. They had made a vow dedicating their daughters to remain virgins and never marry. Thanks a lot, dad! Now their girls were older, and getting older – “past the flower... of... youth” - and they wanted to get married.

Paul begins by telling them it is not “sin” to let them marry. In other words, they do not have to keep their vows. Then he says,

1 Corinthians 7:37 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.

There are several things to consider in making the decision whether to have your daughter remain single:

1. Is the father standing “steadfast in his heart”? In other words, does he have a real conviction that this is God's will, or is he simply being influenced by popular opinion?
2. Is there a “necessity” for them to get married? In other words, do they have the gift of celibacy?
3. Having “power over his own will” means that the decision is his alone to make. It means that his daughter has left it up to her father and has no “will” of her own one way or the other.

Taking these things into consideration, the father must determine in his heart what is best for his daughter in light of the “present distress.”

1 Corinthians 7:38 So then he who gives *her* in marriage does well, but he who does not give *her* in marriage does better.

Paul is again careful to remain balanced. You do well to get married; it’s not wrong or sinful. But in his judgment, especially in anticipation of what is coming, you are “better” off remaining single.

Most single believers can’t remain single. You should get married to another believer. When you do, you will be subject to a great deal more “distractions” than when you were single. But that doesn’t mean you cannot remain single-minded in serving your Lord!

In the book of Ephesians, just before he discusses the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives, Paul says,

Ephesians 5:15 See then that you walk circumspectly...

“Circumspectly” is the word from which we get the English word circumference – the boundary of a circle. When applied to your walk with the Lord it means that you are to walk in every direction with equal ability at the same time.

We normally think of our lives in fragments or compartments – our marriage, our employment, our serving the Lord in church. We think that we can do one or two, but not all of them equally well. Yet Paul says to walk in all directions with equal ability at the same time. How is that possible?

It **is** possible by the Spirit of God Who lives within you. Paul says in Ephesians 5:18, “...be filled with the Spirit.” If you rely on the Spirit of God, even though you can’t remain single, you *can* be single-minded in serving your Lord.

## Conclusion

If you are unmarried – remain single if you can. If you can’t remain single, get married to a believer and stay single-minded in serving your Lord.

