

**06/29/25 Single Minded
1 Corinthians 7:25-40**

Welcome...

We are studying the book of 1 Corinthians. Last week Adrian helped us to see from 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 – whether single or married, widowed or divorced, whether Jew or Gentile, each of us can content and serve Christ in every circumstance.

Contentment is not a sullen shrug that says “What can I do about my circumstances? God is God and I can’t fight Him.”

Instead, Christian contentment says “I trust God, I love Him, I know everything He decides to do is right. In heaven I will celebrate even the smallest details of His decisions in my life. But I do not need to wait until I get to heaven; so I will delight in them now!

Chapters 7–11 of 1 Corinthians comprise Paul’s answers to practical questions about which the believers in Corinth had written him. We know this because periodically Paul will write, “Now concerning the things about which you wrote.” And that is how our text begins in 1 Corinthians 7:25.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:25-40...

In 1969 Three Dog Night recorded a very popular song with the lyrics, “One is the loneliest number that you’ll ever do.” However, the God who gave us the gift of marriage also gives us the gift of singleness.

Unfortunately, singles are sometimes made to feel like the proverbial fifth wheel in the church. Singleness is not a second-class position in God’s kingdom. No one is less spiritual for remaining single.

Sometimes married adults, consciously and unconsciously, put a lot of pressure on singles to marry. Have you ever been in a conversation which goes like this: “Poor Benny Bachelor. He is 35 years old, attractive, has a good job, a dynamic personality but his life is wasted without a wife.” Or, “pray for Sally Single. She is 35 years old, attractive, spiritual, not married and she doesn’t want to get married. What is wrong with her?!”

To make the situation more complex, it seldom occurs to married adults who are always trying to marry off singles that there is something greater than marriage. There is something more important than marriage for some people and that something is meaningful, God directed, gifted singlehood.

In fact, we learned at the beginning of this chapter that Paul talks about the gift of singlehood. And in our text today Paul ends that chapter by explaining that there are four remarkable advantages to the single life which make “one” a lovely number, not a lonely number.

Main point: In 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 Paul explains four advantages that the Christian single person can have in serving God.

- I. The Christian Single Can Experience Less Distress (7:25–28).**
- II. The Christian Single Can Encounter Fewer Distractions (7:29–31)**
- III. The Christian Single Can Enjoy Greater Devotion (7:32–35).**
- IV. The Christian Single Can Exercise a Better Decision (7:36–40).**

My prayer this morning is that each of us will redeem the time God has given us, and that we each examine our hearts to know if Christ is Lord and we will carefully, prayerful, intentionally not just live horizontally but we will live by faith vertically in our risen Savior and wisely make decisions that will count for eternity.

I. Experience Less Distress

Paul's opening words, 'Now concerning' are a shorter form of 'Now about the matters about which you wrote' that we saw in 7:1. These words "now concerning" signal that Paul is now moving to the next item in the Corinthians letter seeking answers from him.

This question came from fathers about their as-yet unmarried virgin daughters, whose marriages it fell to these fathers to arrange. They asked, "Paul, should we or should we not betroth our daughters?"

Paul addresses "virgins" (ESV, "the betrothed") or those who are single. This is primarily a reference to young unmarried women who had never known a man sexually. Perhaps a better translation would be "maidens." Paul answers by speaking to both young unmarried men and women.

Notice again in verse 25 Paul says, "I have no command from the Lord, but I do give an opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy." Jesus did not give a specific command about singleness although He refers to it in Matthew 19:12. So, Paul distinguishes between the inspired words of Jesus and his own inspired judgment which Paul assures to be trustworthy by the mercy of the Lord. He reinforces this in verse 40: "And I think that I also have the Spirit of God."

Simon Kistemaker puts it well: "Paul writes his epistle to the Corinthians by divine inspiration and not human insight (2 Peter 1:20–21). He knows the Lord has given him apostolic authority to speak and to write for the benefit of the church."

Paul writes in verse 26...

This verse informs us that the single life is good, especially when there is a "present distress." This verse is not talking about life in general with its ups and downs but about times of crisis. Paul is referring here to persecution, for we know from Acts 18 the city of Corinth was antagonistic to Christians.

The days in Corinth were hard ones for believers. It was a time of persecution and suffering when one might have to leave home and loved ones at a moment's notice and flee those who hated Christianity. According to Foxe's Book of Martyrs, Erastus, the treasurer of the city of Corinth (Romans 16:23) and probably a convert of Paul's, was martyred.

In light of these desperate times, Paul felt it best for men and women to stay unmarried. Persecution is difficult enough for a single person, but the problems and pain are multiplied for one who is married.

If Paul had been married, his suffering would have been magnified by his worry about his family and knowledge of their worry about him. They would have suffered every time he was beaten or stoned or imprisoned and would have been constantly fearful for his life.

Persecution is bad enough for oneself; it is almost unbearable when one's spouse and children are suffering. While we don't face persecution, there were times when I was flying in the Navy that Paula was afraid that she would lose me in plane crash. At times the fear and worry were debilitating for her. I bring this up, because if she was single then it would not have been a worry to her.

Paul continues in verses 27-28...

The apostle Paul is giving practical advice, not a moral or spiritual command. Believers are still sinful and subject to limitations and weaknesses of the flesh. It is hard enough for a sinner to live with himself, let alone with another sinner.

When two people are bound together in marriage the problems of our sinful hearts are multiplied. Close living allows us to see our partner's faults more clearly, and vice versa.

Many "pressures", "anxieties" and "distractions" accompany marriage including the relationship with in-laws.

I just read about a man, his wife, and his cranky mother-in-law who went on vacation to Israel. While they were there, the mother-in-law passed away. An undertaker told them "You can have your mother-in-law shipped home for \$5,000, or you can bury her here in the Holy Land for \$150." The man thought about it and told the undertaker he would just have his mother-in-law shipped home. The undertaker asked "Why? Why would you spend \$5,000 to ship your mother-in-law home, when it would be wonderful to have her buried here and only spend \$150?" The man said "A man died 2,000 years ago. He was buried here and 3 days later, he rose from the dead. I just can't take that chance."

Remaining unmarried can have the advantage of experiencing less distress. Paul brings up a second advantage that a Christian single can have:

II. Encounter Fewer Distractions (7:29-31)

Verses 29-31...

The phrase "the time has been shortened" referred to the Lord's return (Romans 13:11), but it was also a summary philosophy of life for Paul who lived not for the temporary but for the eternal.

James 4:14 says human life at its longest is brief, "a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." As Jeff read earlier from Ephesians 5:15-17, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Moses prayed in Psalm 90:12, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom"

As Christians we live in the tension of the now and not yet. The kingdom of God has come, but it is not yet here fully and completely. Soon, however, it will be when Christ returns. We must live in the wonderful truth that the Jesus could return anytime, any moment. It is imminent. So, Paul's provides his counsel in verses 29-31.

The phrase "the time has been shortened" in verse 29 provides the controlling principle along with the proper perspective, which we see at the end of verse 31: "This world in its current form is passing away."

God's word tells us our death is an appointment, not an accident, and God knows when it is going to be. Only those who have repented from self and sin and trusted alone in Christ alone for salvation will enjoy eternity with our Lord in heaven. And those who don't bow the knee and embrace Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer will spend eternity in hell.

Ephesians 2:8-10 tells us, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

When you are saved in Christ, when you are born again, you are rescued from the penalty of sin, you are being saved from the power of sin, and one day you will be free from the presence of sin. In the mean time, we are to make the most of our time. We are to redeem the time because we ourselves are redeemed.

Time cannot be stopped. It cannot be stored. Time cannot be saved. It cannot be shared. Wasting the gift of time insults the Giver of time.

We all understand that time is valuable, for even the lost world says, "time is money". Paul is not speaking so much of time in general but of the opportunities that are placed before us.

God has set boundaries to our lives, and our opportunity for service exists only within those boundaries. God knows both the beginning and end of your time on earth. As believers we can achieve our potential in His service only as we maximize the time He has given us.

So, Paul says in verses 30-31, understand the value of possessions and experiences here and enjoy them, but do not get glued to them. None of them will last forever. Even marriage is temporary as Jesus said Matthew 22:30 there will be no marriage in heaven.

We need the perspective of Psalm 73:25-26 where the psalmist prays to the Lord, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Let me encourage you to begin each day with prayer, asking God for wisdom on how to use your time effectively. Be alert for opportunities to share the Gospel. Look for moments to speak about Christ or encourage and build up others in their faith. Use your talents, resources, and time to meet the needs of those around you. Embrace opportunities with a thankful heart, recognizing them as gifts from God.

May we wisely invest our seconds, minutes, hours, and days, realizing that beyond time lies eternity.

We have seen that the Christian single can Experience Less Distress (7:25–28).

Second, the Christian Single Can Encounter Fewer Distractions (7:29–31). Cultivating the proper priorities (7:29–31) and the proper perspective (7:31). Third:

III. Enjoy Greater Devotion

Verses 32-35...

Paul wants us "to be without concerns." Singleness provides a practical advantage. Why? "The unmarried man is concerned about the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord."

When you are married, apart from pleasing the Lord, one of your greatest priorities is pleasing and serving your spouse. A good marriage takes a lot of work, just like any good relationship. It requires vulnerability, transparency, self-sacrificial love, servant-heartedness, communication, kindness, time, and lots of energy.

There is a level of intensity that comes along with "pleasing" a spouse that is very different than pleasing any of your friends. As a single adult, you're free from the hard, daily work of building a good marriage.

Obedying Matthew 6:33 ("But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness") can be easier for the single person because he or she can have a singular focus: Christ and his kingdom. Moreover, the single has fewer of the anxieties, concerns, and cares of this world that a married person with a family has.

Verses 33–35 are the flipside of Paul’s argument in verse 32. Here he states, “But the married man is concerned [ESV, “anxious”] about the things of the world—how he may please his wife” in verse 33. Paul then drives home his point in verse 34 when he says, “and his interests are divided.”

Godly husbands and godly wives will be concerned about their spouse. God intentionally designed marriage this way. Paul’s point is that singleness is a blessing from the Lord in terms of lowering responsibilities and concerns and allowing for undivided devotion.

Paul summarizes these verses by telling us in verse 35 that he is “saying this for your own benefit.” He uses a picturesque metaphor, informing us he has no desire to put a rope around our necks to restrain us, like holding back a horse. His goal is only “to promote what is proper ... so that we may be devoted to the Lord without distraction.”

We have seen that first, the Single Christian Can Experience Less Distress (7:25–28).

Second, the Single Christian Can Encounter Fewer Distractions (7:29–31).

Third, the Single Christian Can Enjoy Greater Devotion (7:32–35) Fourth:

IV. The Christian Single Can Exercise a Better Decision

Look at verses 36–40...

Paul will now bring everything he has been saying to a conclusion. There are some interpretive landmines in these final verses of chapter 7. Nevertheless, his basic meaning is clear: Find God’s will for your life as a single person or a married person and rest in that calling. Both marital statuses are right and good, but there are practical advantages to being single.

Ascetics, like some Roman Catholic monks and nuns, believe a celibate, single lifestyle is morally and spiritually superior to getting married. When I was in college, I was part of the Navigators parachurch ministry. We were also known as the Never-daters because the culture of the ministry promoted singleness as being more spiritual. I remember one of my classmates, Greg Crabtree, was dating a gal and we began to say to him, “What’s wrong with your Greg?! We are never-daters – bachelors to the rapture!”

Of course, I dropped that motto when I met Paula!

There were some who taught in Corinth that singlehood was a superior moral state to marriage and that a person was more spiritual if he or she decided to stay celibate. The Apostle Paul does not deprecate the single state, but he concludes that celibacy is desirable but not demanded. Marriage is good but celibacy is better under certain circumstances if a person has the gift of singleness and can be content in that state.

Paul says, “Not so!” Rather he says in verse 36...

Paul addressed here the fathers of the unmarried girls. In that day, it was the parents who arranged the marriages, the father in particular. Paul had already said in 1 Corinthians 7:35 that he was not laying down an ironclad rule for everybody to follow, regardless of circumstances. Now he makes it clear that the father had freedom of choice whether or not he would give his daughter in marriage.

Even though our modern approach to dating and marriage is completely foreign to the Corinthians, the counsel Paul gave them still applies today. It is a wise thing for couples to counsel with their parents and with their Christian leaders in the church, so that you don’t rush into something which afterward they regret. A very wise person said, “There is something far worse than single loneliness, and that is marital misery.”

Verse 38...

Again Paul speaks of the practical value of singleness. The choice is not between right and wrong but between good (well) and better. Marriage is good. Singleness is good. However, there is no denying the practical advantages of the single life. This is especially true in serving Christ in trying and difficult times of life.

Paul concludes chapter 7 with additional wisdom in the context of marriage and singleness, giving specific attention to the issue of remarriage. Once more he reminds us of the permanence of marriage. Verse 39 says, “A wife is bound as long as her husband is living.” Divorce is never the perfect or desired will of God.

However, “if a woman’s husband dies, she is free to be married to anyone she wants—only in the Lord.” When a Christian’s spouse dies, he or she is free to remarry as long as he or she marries another Christian (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

Addressing widows, he recognizes God had, for a season, gifted them for marriage. Now, he points out, the Lord may be gifting them for singleness. If so, such a widow is not to weep but rejoice! His opinion in verse 40 is that “she is happier if she remains as she is.”

Paul ends this section on a humble but authoritative note: “And I think that I also have the Spirit of God.” Commentator David Garland argues that others in Paul’s day may have been claiming divine inspiration for their extreme views, which Paul has corrected in this chapter. Paul’s point is clear and to the point: “The Holy Spirit guides his counsel, and Paul is not shooting from the hip.”

The Apostle wants to leave us with an emphasis on two important thoughts: namely, that marriage is for life, and Christians should only marry Christians. Married people and singles both need to come to grips with these points.

Aside from the two exceptions that we looked at a couple weeks ago 1) unrepentant sexual immorality and 2) desertion by an unbeliever – aside from those two exceptions, death is the only thing that frees a person for remarriage.

Even then the freedom is not total, for a believer is to marry only another believer, whether it’s a first marriage or a second.

Whenever I consider the value of single people, I remind myself of what I find in the Bible:

- The greatest person who ever lived was single: the God-Man, Jesus Christ.
- The greatest forerunner who ever lived was single: John the Baptist.
- The greatest missionary and theologian who ever lived was single: the apostle Paul.
- The greatest statesman who ever lived was single: Daniel.
- Two of the greatest prophets of Israel who ever lived were single: Elijah and Elisha.

To this list we can add those who were single and God used in a mighty way through history: The great missionaries like David Brainerd, Rachel Saint, Amy Carmichael, pastors like Robert Murray McCheyne, nurses like Florence Nightingale, testimonies like Corrie ten Boom, Bible scholars like John Stott and John Murray and many others.

The people of God have been blessed by single people in the past. We are blessed by singles in the present and will be in the future. God knows what He is doing when He calls people to marriage, and God knows what He is doing when He calls them to singleness. Whatever God’s calling is for you, you can rejoice and be certain that it is His best for you.

Friends, “one” isn’t a lonely number - it’s a lovely number if you are single, celibate, and living for Christ.

Let’s pray...