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## Editor's Preface

The People's Bible Teachings is a series of books on all of the main doctrinal teachings of the Bible.

Following the pattern set by The People's Bible series, these books are written especially for laypeople. Theological terms, when used, are explained in everyday language so that people can understand them. The authors show how Christian doctrine is drawn directly from clear passages of Scripture and then how those doctrines apply to people's faith and life. Most importantly, these books show how every teaching of Scripture points to Christ, our only Savior.

The authors of The People's Bible Teachings are parish pastors and professors who have had years of experience teaching the Bible. They are men of scholarship and practical insight.

We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Professor Leroy Dobberstein of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, and Professor Thomas Nass of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, for serving as consultants for this series. Their insights and assistance have been invaluable.

We pray that the Lord will use these volumes to help his people grow in their faith, knowledge, and understanding of his saving teachings, which he has revealed to us in the Bible. To God alone be the glory.

Curtis A. Jahn  
Series Editor



## Introduction

### What Should This Picture Look Like?

While visiting a foreign country, I saw a bronze statue of a lion. What made this lion unique is that it had the paws of a dog. Apparently the artist who made this sculpture had never seen a lion. He made it from a picture. Since he couldn't see the feet, he wasn't sure what they looked like. So he made them similar to that of a dog.

Some take this same approach as they picture marriage. They aren't sure what this picture should look like. They wonder where they can see a good picture of marriage.

The image of marriage they see in the media is unclear, to say the least. Whether they view the evening sitcoms or the afternoon soaps, the picture they see is one of cheating spouses and troubled lives. Sex is the main item of conversation—and the main activity—for those who aren't married, and divorce is the easy way out of an unfulfilling relationship.

Perhaps these people didn't see a good picture of marriage in their homes. Maybe they are the children of divorce or the victims of abuse. Maybe their fathers were distant or their mothers domineering. They want to see a positive picture of marriage. But they aren't sure where to look.

Others fancy themselves as artists. With brush in hand, they paint their own pictures of marriage.

Have you ever noticed that some people are quite creative with the method or manner in which they tie the knot? Some do so while skydiving; others, while scuba diving. One couple even had their wedding in the grocery store where they worked. The bride walked down the frozen food aisle. The “altar” was a stack of cans.

Just as some are creative with their weddings, so some are also creative with the marriages that follow. They feel that they are free to paint any number of people into their portrait of marriage and to put them wherever they want on the canvas. It’s no wonder that many of these creative marriages end up as not-so-creative divorces.

To see a true picture of marriage, we have to go to the family photo album that God has given in his Word. Not all the marriages we see on the pages of Scripture are models to follow. From Adam and Eve to Ananias and Sapphira, sin has stained the picture of many a marriage. But in his Word, the Lord does give us some marriage principles that paint a picture which God calls “very good.” Let’s open the cover of this picture album. The photos we find there are sure to catch our attention.



# 1

## The Single State

### *Do I Fit in the Marriage Picture?*

I once ran in a small-town race. Since I chose the shorter race and competed against only a few runners, I won first place in my age division. After the race, the organizer asked the first place winners to gather for a picture. I remember feeling a sense of satisfaction as I posed for the photo. However, when I saw the picture in the paper some time later, there I was standing with all the distance runners who ran the longer race. I was in the wrong picture. I didn't fit.

Some people feel the same way about this family photo album. They look at a portrait of marriage and wonder, "Do I fit in this picture?"

***“Single” before God***

As we look at this picture of marriage, it is good to note that before God we all stand as “singles,” that is, as individuals. We are not saved because our parents believed. We are not condemned because our children sinned. Nor does the choice of the right marriage partner guarantee us a place at the wedding supper of the Lamb on the Last Day. Before God, each of us is an individual sinner redeemed by the blood of Christ.

On the Last Day, we will also stand before God as singles. “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage” (Matthew 22:30). When we fill out our form for the “eternal revenue service” on the Last Day, we won’t have to list our marital status. We won’t have to indicate whether we are single, married, widowed, or divorced. Nor will we be judged as families or married couples. Each of us will stand before God as an individual. It is our personal trust in Christ and his atoning work that God will consider.

So while marriage is an important relationship in life, it is only for this life. The idea that couples are married “for time and eternity” is foreign to Scripture. Jesus clarified this matter when he told some skeptical Sadducees, “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Matthew 22:30). Marriage is an arrangement God established for the brief time we live on this earth. In the eternal life of heaven, “the old order of things [will have] passed away” (Revelation 21:4). This old order includes marriage.

***Marriage—pleasing to God***

When we look at the opening chapters of Genesis, we see that the institution of marriage is woven into the cre-

ation account. It is almost like a picture within a picture—an option that some TVs and camcorders have. The large picture is the creation of man and woman. Inset into this picture is God’s institution of marriage. The reason why these two are presented together is because God created man and woman for marriage. When God said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), he was indicating that marriage was his design for man and woman in society.

***Single state—pleasing to God***

The fact that God created man and woman for marriage does not mean that God wants every man and every woman to get married. In 1 Corinthians 7:1 the apostle Paul states, “It is good for a man not to marry.” In the section that follows, he reveals that some Christians have a spiritual gift to live in the single state in a chaste and self-controlled way. Such Christians may use this gift to serve God and other people in a special way as single people. The apostle himself serves as an example of this and goes so far as to say: “I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that” (1 Corinthians 7:7). Jesus also speaks of serving God in the single state when he says that some people “have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:12).

Paul explains how a Christian may use this gift to serve God. Later in the chapter, he indicates that a single person is freed from the concerns that go with marriage and family life. As a result, a single person may have more time and energy to devote to the Lord’s work. Paul states: “An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s

affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:34). When we consider the fast-paced lifestyle that families face today, we can appreciate what the apostle Paul means by “the affairs of this world.” Not only do husbands and wives spend considerable time caring for each other and meeting each other’s needs, they may also devote a large amount of time and effort to caring for their children. Soccer practices, basketball games, music lessons, doctor appointments, shopping trips, school activities—all of these can eat away at the hours of the day. These concerns of the world can quickly consume a parent’s time and drain his or her energy. Paul is not saying that these things are sinful. He is stressing that they take time.

In contrast, those who are single do not face these same concerns. It is true that they may have other concerns to face, ones that may also consume some time. Yet they do not face the sometimes overwhelming concerns of family life, and this may result in more expendable time. Those who have the gift to live as singles can use this time and energy to serve their God through his church.

### ***Not a higher state***

There are some that consider either the married state or the single state to be a higher state. But Scripture does not support either view. Paul states that those who have the ability to live as singles without being led into sexual sin can use their gift to serve God. They are not failing to fulfill God’s will for marriage by remaining single. Likewise, those who do not have the gift to be single but desire to marry should do so, “for it is better to marry than to burn

with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:9). A married person can also use his or her situation to serve God.

In our Christian liberty, God gives us the freedom to marry or to remain single. God blesses both states. Those who hold out celibacy as a higher form of spiritual pureness and devotion do not have the support of Scripture. Scripture actually says that to forbid people to marry is something taught by demons (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Virginity is not the ultimate form of spiritual purity. A faithfully married man or woman is just as pure in God’s sight as a single person who abstains from sexual relations.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, it is not right to give single people the impression that unless they marry, they are not complete persons. This message is often sent to single people. Whether this message is subtle or delivered in a blunt manner, it gives the impression that the married state is superior to the single state. However, this view is contrary to the principle that Scripture sets down in 1 Corinthians 7:1: “It is good for a man not to marry.” So we see that God approves of both the married state and the single state. Neither is superior or inferior to the other.

### ***Single but hopeful***

There is a type of single person that Paul does not mention in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. This is the one who wants to marry but has not found a suitable partner. Maybe you know someone who fits into this category. Or maybe you personally have looked for but have not found someone with whom you want to share a lifetime. Such people can picture themselves as married. Maybe they even long for the day when they can be married. But so far that picture has not developed. They are still single with few or no prospects in sight. Maybe they have even played