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COVER PACKAGE

Restless, Reformed, and Single

Online dating services argue that God can use virtual reality too.

Sarah Pulliam | posted 7/31/2009 09:45AM

By day, firefighter Dean Scott puts out flames in rural western Washington. By night, he tries to kindle them between Reformed singles around the country.

Scores of Christian dating websites (and dating sites that market themselves to Christians) are doing their part to solve the delayed marriage problem by promising to pair like-minded couples. But Scott's [SovereignGraceSingles.com](#) hopes to take compatibility tests to a new level, making sure that singles are on the same page theologically.

Singles who build profiles on SovereignGraceSingles answer questions such as, "How have the Doctrines of Grace changed or affected your life?" "Do you have a Quiet Time?" and "Who is your favorite biblical character and why?" Members' usernames include tulips, restinginrgrace0611, and ReformedSoutherner.

Baylor University professor of theology Roger Olson, author of *Arminian Theology*, is a bit surprised that the site, which hosts nearly 800 members and has borne 37 reported marriages, is catching on.

"It's an example of a larger dissonance between Calvinist theology and Calvinist practice," Olson said. "If God has foreordained everything, then why should I feel any urgency to act?"

Scott said he has heard few theological objections to the site since it launched in 2005.

"It doesn't sound very Calvinist, but I think we should use all means possible, including the Internet, to find someone," said Scott, who met his wife, Karen, on the site he built. I don't think it's antithetical to God's sovereignty at all. It's a means that he's provided to use in the lives of single, Reformed folks."

Paul David Tripp, author of *Marriage: Whose Dream?*, says Christians of various theological stripes have trouble deciding whether to use an online site to find a mate.

"There will always be questions of the degree to which you should be active and the degree to which you should wait around," says Tripp, who preaches at Philadelphia's renowned Tenth Presbyterian Church.

"There's something problematic about saying, 'I'm going to get married and I'm going to use whatever tool out there.' There's no promise in Scripture that a single man or woman will get married."

At Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland, pastor Isaac Hydoski worries that singles are using online dating sites because they are discouraged.

"Many times, it can be an expression of a last-ditch attempt to take the bull by the horns," he said. "It can be done in a way that's submitted to God's will, or it can be done as an expression of self-sufficiency."

But Hydoski sees online dating, if rooted in pure motives, as just another way for singles to find each other, no different from couples who meet at a church singles' group or a gas station.

"It's not any less significant, less romantic, or more disconnected from God's sovereignty in terms of how you met," Hydoski says. "That's a mistake of Christians over-romanticizing decisions like this."

Lisa Anderson, who hosts *The Boundless Show*, Focus on the Family's podcast for single young adults, tried online dating and found it a mixed bag. Single and 37, Anderson prefers to seek potential partners in a physical community rather than a virtual one.

"I had friends who found guys who would lay out the Westminster Confession and make you sign it before they talked to you. That spells freak with a capital F," she said. "But on [eHarmony](#), I get matched with guys who aren't believers. When you can go online and sift through profiles like paint samples, it breeds a consumerist mentality."

Anderson believes Christians should think about God's will in dating as they do in other spheres of life.

"You have to apply for a home. You have to look for a career," she said. "The Bible says, 'He who finds a wife, finds a good thing,' not, 'He who sits around and plays Xbox goes to a singles' group where God shines a spotlight on the right woman.' We should be availing ourselves of our community and the power of family and friends."

[ChristianCafe.com](#), another online dating site, has seen 1.5 million members since its launch in 1999. [ChristianCafe.com](#) president Sam Moorcroft says, "The pagans are out having a good time meeting someone, while the rest of us are sitting in our closets thinking it's unbiblical. Let's not let the world have all the good dating sites."

Sarah Pulliam is online editor for Christianity Today.

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