

Intro:

We're in our series "Church: are you serious," through the Bible book of 1 Corinthians. As we've mentioned before, there are many reasons why we're in this series. One of them is because we believe God is calling us to be a healthy spiritual community so that he can use us to bring His goodness and good news to the world. Hurt people hurt people, healthy people heal people. This will apply to our passage today, passage on sex, marriage, and singleness.

In today's passage, Paul begins to address some of the questions the Corinthians wrote about (remember that this is a letter between two parties, a letter that is part of longer list of exchanges). It should be no surprise that their first one is about sex, and leads to a discussion about sex, marriage, and singleness. It's a good thing, given it's a big part of our lives as a humanity. And it's crucial we have a good, whole, healthy view of sex, marriage, singleness as a Christian community. We're going to cover mostly marriage today, and being single next week, though we'll touch on it today.

Singles- I do want to note that there is something here for you. If you're thinking about getting married, pay attention. If that's not necessarily on your radar, there's some good stuff still because marriage teaches us what God's love for us is like, given that the Bible often uses a marriage relationship to describe the relationship God has with his people.

And so we're talking about sex and marriage today, with the understanding that there's something here for all of us. Let's read the text, and I'll be making two general points.

Read Text: 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

As you can see, the church in Corinth had some specific questions and issues that wanted Paul to address. As we approach this passage, we need to be constantly aware of how the passage was directed to a specific group with specific issues that existed 2000 years ago. But the passage is surprisingly relevant to today, and I want to frame our discussion with two points that I believe the passage tells us today. Two things to take away for marrieds.

Keep Sex Alive

The problem: "sex is optional."

The Corinthians were dealing with misguided abstinence, particularly in the area of marriage (v.1). That this is a quotation from the mouth of the Corinthians, and not Paul, is important to note. That this is about marriage (and not just sex in general) is seen in Paul's description in v.2- the solution is to go deeper with your spouse, not find a spouse.

We're not sure why they were exactly saying this. Perhaps it was an affect of parts of their culture- sexual abstinence was pretty common in certain religious groups back then, and was a way to get power and prestige through supposedly seeming more holy and dedicated.

Paul says no to this, an essentially commands marriages to keep sex alive! Two nuances with this.

The command to keep sex alive.

1. Inner commitment (v.2). The word here does not mean go find a spouse if you don't have one. It assumes you have one, and it means hold fast to something, to have a sort of inner commitment. We need to have this inner commitment to our spouse, and specifically in the area of sex.
2. Outer giving (v.3). Of your bodies.

The reasons:

- A sexual culture that promotes a whole lot of sex outside of the context of marriage. In light of the untruth about sex there, live out the truth of sex in marriage. Or maybe in light of the temptation there, live out the beauty of marriage.
- Ownership and rights. Marriage is a coming together of two people where they belong to each other. You are obliged to do so, and in fact not doing so is robbery toward your spouse (v.5- the word used was used previously for defrauding and lawsuits).

An exception:

Mutually agreed upon prayer. Note the extreme hesitancy "except perhaps." This is not something you have to do; it's a big maybe!

Our context:

a. Marrieds.

This is just as important today, given that there can be a lot of forces that cause one or both spouses in a marriage to downplay the role of sex- a difference in sex drive, notions of sex from growing up, sexual abuse prior to marriage, and so on. Furthermore, we live a sex saturated culture, like the Corinthians, where sex outside of marriage is essentially the norm. I want to encourage you to open up to change by talking with someone and getting some help if you find yourself stuck here. You know that the conflict is great over this in your marriage. I have talked with people who

were literally on the verge of divorce because of conflict here. And I know it is so hard to talk about it. But know that people have, and people have actually broken through.

b. Singles

- Singleness can be a good thing. It is a gift, just like marriage is a gift (v.6). More on this next week.
- Sex is not a bad reason to marry. It can't be the only reason, but it's not a bad one. (v.8-9). The implication of this is potentially marrying younger.
- What do we learn from God? That every aspect of our lives counts in our relationship with Him. When he wants relationship with us, he wants us to give all of who we are to him. We can't hold back one part of us and think "ah, the spiritual commitment is what counts." No, he owns all- that's the sort of relationship he's looking for.

Keep Commitment Alive

Paul then switches his discussion to the issue of divorce. We're not too sure why this is an issue. Perhaps it was the reality that the surrounding culture was a pretty divorce happy culture. One Roman thinker notes: Many "reckon their years not by the number of consuls but by the number of their husbands. They leave home in order to marry, and marry in order to divorce." Seneca (First Century AD), *DeBeneficiis*, 3.16.2.

But perhaps it was the same sense of spirituality that caused some to not want sex in marriage. Note how in v.14, in the discussion of if a Christian spouse should stay with a non-Christian one, the words holy and unclean are used. It is thought that Christian spouses were concerned that they were being somehow displeasing to God by continuing to stay in that marriage, having sex with the non-Christian spouse, and so on. Paul is going to say "no, that is not the case. Stay in the marriage."

Regardless the case, Paul is clear in saying keep commitment alive. Two groups he talks to:

1. Christian-Christian marriages. Divorce is unacceptable. (v.10-11)

Note how this is based on the teachings of Jesus (v.10). What we're talking about is the explicit teachings on record in the Gospels. Paul gives a command in v. 12 that is not explicitly recorded in the Gospel. Nonetheless, he can and will give instruction there because of the nature of the matter.

In any case, Christian-Christian divorce is not acceptable. In fact, even if they do divorce, the spouse should either a) remain unmarried or b) be reconciled. Note that there is no talk of re-marriage.

2. Christian-non Christian marriages. Divorce is acceptable if the non-Christian person leaves. (v.12-14). This is unacceptable because the marriage bonds are actually still a God thing, even if the spouse is a non-Christian. This is part of the reason why Paul wants to note that the relationships is still holy (note the "for" used in v.14). And Paul also wants them to stay because of the potential positive spiritual effect on the unbelieving spouse. (v.13,16)

Our Context:

The Divorced:

Grace is here, there is forgiveness. Christians have often been accused of singling out divorce as a worse sin than others, a sin that forever defines you. We have no plans of doing that here at Ethnos. But we do need you to be honest, particularly if you divorced as a Jesus follower, and recognize that divorce is a sin, it is a breaking of God's heart and desire. It, along with other sins, should not be taken lightly. Confess the sin, seek to be changed from that.

Marrieds:

- Fight for commitment with all you have. Be aware of where the attacks are. If you are an unbelieving person in a marriage, you're in a good spot, be encouraged. Again, get the support you need, the community and counsel.

Singles:

- Commitment is serious. Get a sober mind about it if you want to move forward. And get involved with pre-engagement counseling.

The "what if" sheet.

- Know that God's is deeply committed to us in Jesus, more committed than we can imagine. John 10:28-29, Romans 8:38-39.

Questions? Comments?

Challenge:

- Commit to God.
- Commit to Community.
- Commit to Change.

Extra Study Notes:

v.1- That Paul is most likely citing a quote the Corinthians use, and not his own thought, is seen as follows: The phrasing “now concerning” is used 5 other times in 1 Corinthians-7:25, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1, 16:12. Four times he uses “I” to state his thought on the matter. Once he uses “we” to note a common held quote between the Corinthians and himself. He uses neither here, suggesting that this is not what he is saying, but what the Corinthians have said.

v.10- based off Mark 10:9, 11-12

v.11- Concerning remarriage after a divorce, some debate does exist. However, the command in this situation is clear, along with v.39. What is under question is a situation arising from v.15.

For discussion on the grounds of divorce, see the two views:

Instone-Brewer, Wider view: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/october/20.26.html>

Piper, Narrower View: http://www.desiringgod.org/media/pdf/bwjd_ch_40-42.pdf

v. 12- Paul is not saying here that what he writes is not authoritative as Jesus’ commands. He saying that Jesus did not explicitly give this command (unlike v.10). Later he will be much more clear about what is advice (v. 25-26).

v.14- This probably arose because some of the Corinthians were thinking they would be sinning if they stayed married/had sex with unbelieving spouses; they would become defiled. Note 1 Cor 5:9-11. Paul is saying the opposite- they will actually affect the unbelieving spouse positively. The background is the Old Testament concept of holiness- things can be made holy (set apart) through touch. (Lev 6:18). Spouse is set apart, different, distinct- because of believing spouse. They are distinct in the sense that they get to experience something others do not who are not in their situation- they get to see God in a unique way. Nonetheless, they still need to experience salvation (v.16)

Furthermore, given the “for” in v.14 connecting the verses prior, Paul’s point is to help people see that their marriage is still legitimate in God’s eyes, and that they should not divorce.

v.15- Be at peace refers back to why one should try and stay married (v.12-13), not that one should be at peace (not fight) if someone wants to leave them (v.15b). In the culture of the time, you could not really argue for someone to stay, legally speaking. If someone wanted to leave, they just did it.