

Christ Community Covenant Church
Spirit Filled Living in a Broken and Fallen World
1 Corinthians 7 – Remaking relationships in the Image of God, Part 2
Pastor Dave Scherrer - January 22, 2017

Do you eavesdrop? I kinda do. They say it's impolite, but I kinda think it is interesting.

We have entered into a three part series where we get to kinda eavesdrop into an important conversation. It goes something like this.

I just gave my life to Christ. I only want to follow Him and do His will, but I don't know what that means to me. So much has changed - everything has changed! I'm not sure how to live anymore. Should I stay single, or should I marry? My friend is engaged, she's thinking of calling it off. My sister became a Christian and her husband doesn't believe. She has kids – what happens to them? Should she ask for a divorce for the good of the kids? And my dad is a widower and he's a Christian and he is thinking of getting married again – maybe that's a bad idea? I'm so confused.

Apparently Paul has been peppered with these kinds of questions by the church in Corinth. Personal questions . . . Intimate questions. Last week we looked at questions raised about intimate relationships in marriage and now he turns his attention to understanding the circumstances of the unmarried and of widows and widowers.

Understanding the circumstances of the unmarried and widows

Interestingly, think this subject is still just as vital. Maybe more so. In the first century it was not uncommon for girls age 12 to be given to marriage. It was also not uncommon for girls to have three to five or more husbands in their lifetime, as divorce was an indiscriminant practice in the Greek culture and also those Jews who followed the teachings of Rabbi Himmel. Now in our country, in the past 60 years there has been a huge sociological swing regarding marriage and divorce and singleness and remarriage. Truthful and accurate and tender teaching to singles and single again has never been any more important.

There were a couple main thoughts that shaped this advice found in this chapter that we should be aware of;

First, Paul had a belief that Jesus was coming soon

In this letter Paul writes ²⁹ This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short (v29). And not just here in this passage. In describing the end of times, Paul said (1 Thes. 4:15) "We tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep." He paints the second coming as immanent. He taught its immanence, but not its timing. This is what Jesus did. Jesus taught us to be ready at any hour for His return. But that could be easily misunderstood. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24-25). The apostle John wrote "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour (1 John 2:18). That understanding and hope, of the immanent return of Christ, shaped how believers made decisions and charted their lives. And apparently that was part of what was happening here in this church. And it made the church nervous and concerned.

Comment: I wonder if maybe we would be better served if we live with more urgency and a sense of the immanent return. If we believed He would return in the next 20 years would that change your decisions in the short run. Would that help to keep us paying attention to our every decision? I think maybe . . .

Second, his over-arching hope in this passage was to address the angst that many were feeling over their worldly circumstances and roles

Apparently we are not the only generation that feels unsettled with things, that feel like our circumstances and relationships are all mixed up and changing before our eyes.

1 Corinthians 7:6-9 Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. ⁷ I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. ⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. ⁹ But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Corinthians 7:32-38 ³² I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. ³³ But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. ³⁵ I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

³⁶ If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. ³⁷ But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. ³⁸ So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.

When we read this there is a question begging to be addressed, is this passion God invented for marriage a gift or is it more of a problem?

So, is “*passion*” a gift or a problem??

Paul is making a case that the gift of physical intimacy is given to us by God as a blessing of love for marriage that knits souls together. And he is also saying that if that gift is burning inside you should seek to marry so that the gift can have its full reward and purpose.

When Paul says I wish you could all be like me – I don't think it is so much about being single as he is saying the celibate life has given him a gift of being undistracted for Christ. Singleness in the first century was mostly unheard of and generally dangerous for women as there were no legal and social protections for them. Even today singleness isn't usually considered a gift. I suspect if the survey were done, most of today's singles would say they are reluctantly single. They wish they had a partner, they never dreamed divorce would hit them; they have sadly lost a spouse. But it does happen that singles can see the gift in it.

ILLUSTRATION: John RW Stott

In spite of rumors to the contrary, I have never taken a solemn vow or heroic decision to remain single! On the contrary, during my 20s and 30s, like most people, I was expecting to marry one day. In fact, during this period I twice began to develop a relationship with a lady who I thought might be God's choice of life-partner for me. But when the time came to make a decision, I can best explain it by saying that I lacked an assurance from God that he meant me to go forward. So I drew back. And when that had happened twice, I naturally began to believe that God meant me to remain single. ~ *John Stott, All Souls Church of England, Langham Place*

Truth for all of us:

- 1. Contentedness in Christ is the highest call**
- 2. Christ defines life – not marriage or singleness or family**

1 Corinthians 7:17 Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

He is not saying stand still and never move a muscle, he is saying be content. Slave, free, circumcised or not, single or married (each of these are filled with meaning in the first century) He is saying don't get caught up in it or feel proud . . . or deprived. "Set your mind on Christ" and the social status you are in will take on its meaning in Christ! We all, single, married and divorced and widowed need to remember some things . . .

Advice for all of us

The family of God grows not by propagation through sexual intercourse, but by regeneration through faith in Christ.

The kingdom isn't increased by having more kids; it is only expanded when hearts and souls submit to Christ. Now it is true that children of Christian parents are in a great place to hear and see the truth, but there are no grandchildren in the Kingdom of God.

Relationships in Christ are more permanent, and more precious, than relationships in families

Of course, it is wonderful when relationships in families *are* also relationships in Christ; but we know that is often not the case. Marriages and families often threaten to fall into the category of idolatry when we place them ahead of our relationship with Christ.

That marriage is temporary, and finally gives way to the relationship to which it was pointing all along: Christ and the church

Mark 12:25 ²⁵ For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

In the same way that a picture is no longer needed when you see face to face.

That faithfulness to Christ defines the value of life; all other relationships get their final significance from this. No family relationship is ultimate; relationship to Christ is.

Advice for singles

Be content: All things of this world are passing away

1 Corinthians 7:22-24 For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. ²³ You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. ²⁴ So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

You have 'freedom' – use it in your devotion to Christ

1 Corinthians 7:35 ³⁵ I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Get out of debt
Clean out your closet
Pursue your dreams in Christ
Know this: If you're single, Satan is after you!

1 Corinthians 7:17 Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

- Elisabeth Elliot Jim Elliot missionary to the Auca of eastern Ecuador, married only for three years she spent the next 14 years single.
- In 1969, Elisabeth married Addison Leitch, professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. Leitch died in 1973.
- In 1977, she married Lars Gren, a hospital chaplain and remained married until her death in 2015.
- 35 years married with three husbands with 18 years of singleness mingled in – she said this;

"If you are married, then accept that. Accept the husband that God has given you. If you are single, accept your singleness and take it as if today was the last day of your life. Don't be looking constantly to the future.

I remember what Jim wrote to me in one of his letters: "Let not our longing slay the appetite of our living." And I think there are a lot of single women who are allowing their longing to slay the appetite of their living. They are not throwing their heart and soul into the will of God for today, because they are simply dying inside for something that God has not given them." ~ Elisabeth Elliot