

Week 5: Sacred Love Unites - 1 Cor 6:13 - 7:40

Pre-Work

- The subject of marriage in 1 Corinthians must be approached in the context of what marriage meant to the people of Corinth. Marriages in the church at Corinth were partly informed by the ideas surrounding marriage in the Greco-Roman world. Corinth was a Greco-Roman city. Some of these ideas make sense to us today, but many of them are alien and disturbing. Paul had to contend with the implications of a Christ-centered marriage within a society of corrupt and un-Christlike expectations. To get some disturbing insights on marriage in the Roman Empire at the time 1 Corinthians was written, watch the 10 minute video below.

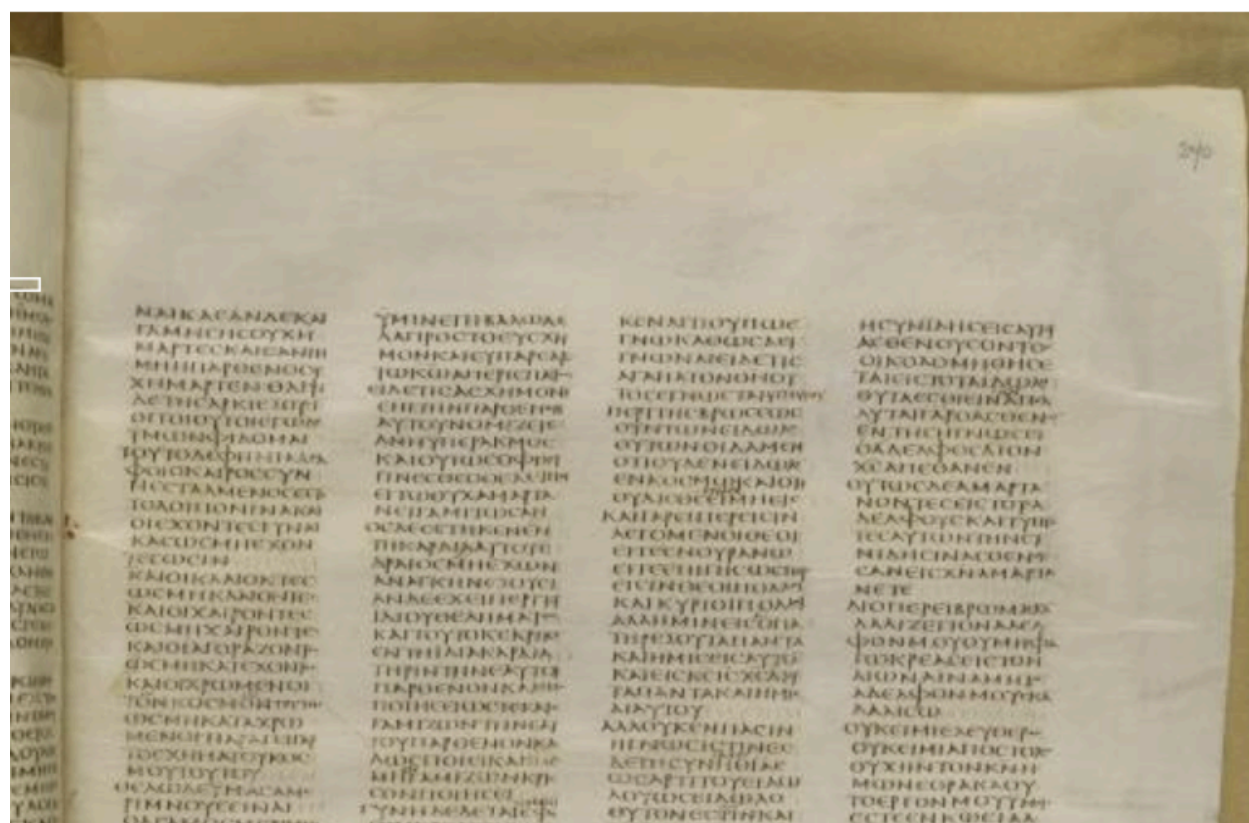
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrZx_WzByBo

- After watching the above video, please read the text for this week's lesson (1 Corinthians 6:13-7:40) in the translation of your choice. What Roman social pressures may have been at issue when Paul gives his advice and warnings about sex and marriage?

Class Notes

Paul is now contending with questions and comments from a letter written to him by the Corinthians (which we do not have).

Why it is difficult to parse what is from the Corinthians and what is from Paul



Approaching this text with humility

Corinthians: 13 Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, however God will do away with both of them.

- The church at Corinth seems to think that physical substances and concerns exist to satisfy the needs of the physical body (example, food), but since all these things will go away, one need not concern oneself with them. Indulgence is ok.

Paul: But the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.

- Paul is onto them. Their statement about food is really about indulging their sexual appetites. If they can get Paul to sign off on the fact that the body isn't important, that gives them license to do whatever they want with their bodies.
- Paul does not accept that the body exists to be indulged in any kind of sexual behavior a person wants.
- The “body” (individually and the Church) is actually for the Lord, and the Lord is for the “body” (individually and the Church). He has turned their argument about food around on them.

14 Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.

- Their theology of their bodies is flawed, because it does not take into account the fact that their bodies will be raised just like Jesus' body was raised (more on this later)

15 Do you not know that your bodies are parts of Christ? Shall I then take away the parts of Christ and make them parts of a prostitute? Far from it! **16** Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, “THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.” **17** But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

- In Roman society, men having sex with prostitutes was not considered adultery. The Corinthians are trying to find a loophole to allow this behavior (for men) in the church.
- If the Church is the Body of Christ, then your body is a part of the Body - would you imagine Christ getting paid sexual services?
- We are also the Bride of Christ (corporately and individually), as foreshadowed in Genesis 2.

18 Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. **19** Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and *that* you are not your own? **20** For you have been bought for a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

- Note Paul does not say to “resist” sexual immorality but to run from it.
- Would you desecrate the Temple (the place where Heaven and Earth intersect)?
- Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, redeemed by the life of Jesus, so use it to reflect Him.

Chapter 7

Marriage in the Greco-Roman world

Marriage in the Jewish world

The Biblical ideal of marriage and New Creation

Paul: 1 Now concerning the things about which you wrote,

Corinthians: it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

- The Corinthians don’t mean “never touch a woman” (obviously), but “avoid marriage”. Paul doesn’t disagree with the idea of singleness, but he wants to make sure they are on the same page with “why” singleness is good.
- The Corinthians may think that being single opens the door for far more sexual exploits (since the body doesn’t matter), while marriage is restricting.

Paul: 2 But because of sexual immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.

- To Paul, marriage opens the door to God-blessed sex and prevents sinning against the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of that, Paul is not against marriage for men.
- Note how he says “each woman her own husband” - this subverts Greco-Roman ideas of patriarchal dominance in marriage.

3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise the wife also to her husband. **4** The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise the husband also does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

- Complementarianism, Egalitarianism, and Mutualism.

5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

- Why would Corinthian Christian husbands and wives deprive one another?
 - To save up sexual energy for prostitutes?
 - To seem “more spiritual”?
 - To exert power over the spouse?
- “Except by agreement” - mutualism

6 But this I say by way of concession, not of command. **7** Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another in that.

- Concession not command in the Bible
- I wish the men were celibate, but to be so is a gift not everyone has
- Why not women gifted as celibate? Not an exclusion, but would be equivalent to “marginalizing myself” or to wish the death of a husband

8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. **9** But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.

- To unmarried men and widowed women, all good to stay that way
- Go ahead and get married if you want sex to be a part of your life

10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife is not to leave her husband **11** (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband is not to divorce his wife.

- General rule not intended to cover every circumstance the Corinthians find themselves in.
- Being a part of the church means a single woman has family and won’t have to starve or become a slave or go back to her dad if she ditches her husband
- The mission is best served by forgoing her “right” (to a divorce) and take up a missional responsibility (to love her husband as a witness to him and to the community)
- Husband not divorce his wife??? This is extremely subversive advice, a shocker in their culture.

12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. **13** And if any woman has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not divorce her husband.

- This is Paul's personal advice guided by his missional and responsibility-to-love mindset
 - A believing Corinthian man should not divorce his pagan wife!!!!
 - Mutuality: women in the church, treat unbelieving husbands the same way.

14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

- Is Paul talking about individual salvation or the role of the unbelieving spouse in the Church? Unbelieving spouses can participate in the "Kingdom of God life" by virtue of their marriage.
- The children of these marriages can also participate in every benefit the church community offers.

15 Yet if the unbelieving one is leaving, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us in peace.

- Staying married is not a way to hold an unwilling partner hostage. If the unbelieving spouse wants to leave, do not oppress them by keeping them married. That's not love.
- The assumption is that believing couples will not want to leave one another if they are living in New Creation life towards one another.

16 For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

- If staying in a marriage with an unbeliever is loving, that could lead them to Jesus. If allowing them to leave if they want is loving, that could lead them to Jesus.
- The whole point is mission, not rights
- This kind of specific instruction is "milk", because they are not wise enough in the cruciform life for this kind of thing to come naturally.

17 Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this way let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. **18** Was any man called *when he was already* circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. **19** Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters* is the keeping of the commandments of God. **20** Each *person* is to remain in that state in which he was called.

- For men in the Roman Empire, divorce and remarriage was almost always about improving status. The obsession in that world was “moving up”.
- Is getting circumcised “moving up” in honor with the Jewish community? Is a Jewish believer tempted to ditch his cultural heritage to gain honor with the gentile community?

21 Were you called as a slave? Do not let it concern you. But if you are also able to become free, take advantage of *that*. **22** For the one who was called in the Lord as a slave, is the Lord’s freed person; likewise the one who was called as free, is Christ’s slave. **23** You were bought for a price; do not become slaves of people.

- Buying your way out of slavery is not the main goal in the life of a believer
- If an opportunity for freedom comes around, take it and stay free
- Once free, do not sell yourself into slavery again, because you belong to Christ

24 Brothers *and sisters*, each one is to remain with God in that *condition* in which he was called.

- This is a general guideline (one exception to it is v21 above), not a rule for every circumstance. It relates to *social status*. Do not allow social status in this corrupt world determine your identity, whether that is climbing the social ladder in patronage, divorce and remarriage, ethnic realignment, or thinking yourself worth less than others because you have been unable to escape slavery. Each one is a son or daughter of God.

Corinthians: Question concerning virgins

Paul: 25 Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I am offering direction as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. **26** I think, then, that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.

- Virgins - in this society, referring to women who have never married or daughters who have become of age

- “The present distress” - increasing hostility to believers from Romans and Jewish leaders, and the coming war between the Jews and Romans
- If a man wishes to spare a family the coming persecution, it is “good”, perfectly ok to remain unmarried

27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. **28** But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.

- The idea here is to think of the other person instead of yourself. What is most kind to others?

Yet such people *as yourselves* will have trouble in this life, and I *am trying to spare you*.

29 But this I say, brothers, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; **30** and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; **31** and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the *present* form of this world is passing away.

- Massive turmoil was on its way
 - The persecution of Nero
 - The Jewish War
 - The Bar Kochba revolt
 - The crisis of the 3rd Century, plagues, and wars
 - The Institutionalization of the Church
 - The decline and fall of Rome
 - Everything since

32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; **33** but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, **34** and *his interests* are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. **35** I say this for your own benefit, not to put a restraint on you, but to promote what is appropriate and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord.

- A loving husband or wife is going to have double the distress when things go bad. Self sacrifice is easier when it doesn't drag a spouse along with.

36 But if anyone thinks that he is acting dishonorably toward his virgin, if she is past her youth and it ought to be so, let him do what he wishes, he is not sinning; let them marry.

- Again, it is thinking of others first. If a father thinks he is bringing harm to his daughter by not allowing her to marry, then of course let her marry.

37 But the one who stands firm in his heart, if he is not under constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin, he will do well.

- If a father is able to prevent his daughter from getting into an oppressive marriage situation and is not constrained by the desires of his daughter, it is fine for him to continue to support his daughter financially as she gets older.

38 So then, both the one who gives his own virgin in marriage does well, and the one who does not give *her* in marriage will do better.

- The rule is not “make her marry” or “prevent her from marrying”, but the rule of love: what is most kind and loving?

Possibly from the Corinthians, possibly from Paul: **39** A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

Paul: **40** But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

- Just as Paul thinks it best for a man to remain unmarried, but it’s not a hard rule, he also thinks a widow may be happier not marrying. The idea is not to exert social pressure on a widow to get married.

"Paul's approach is to put the leaven of the gospel into the structure of the Christian community, not into the larger society directly, and let it do its work over the course of time. As with the matter of women, Paul believes in living a true Christian life and letting the natural implications of that bring transformation to the patriarchal and slave society. He meant for the Christian community to live out its new freedom, thus bearing witness to the larger community about their values. Apparently, no early Christian, by litigation or by appeal to governing authorities or by revolt, ever tried to change the social fabric of ancient society. It was by means of witness and change within the Christian community that a new worldview was promulgated." ~Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*

Reflections