

Honour God with your bodies (Malachi 2:15-16 & 1 Corinthians 7:1-40)

19-Apr-20

G'Day church family

Today we're continuing our look at the **Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians** - which we interrupted for **Easter** - and we're now looking at **chapter 7**

It's a **difficult chapter** - so we really need God's help in understanding His Word. Let's pray...

It would be good to have your **Bibles open to 1 Cor chapter 7**

Intro/Context

[PowerPoint 1-Intro]

- Just to **remind you** where we got up to **last time**
- In **chapter 6** - the **Apostle Paul** spoke about **sexual immorality**
- And he finished the chapter with vv19-20
- Do you not know that your bodies are **temples of the Holy Spirit**, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore, **honour God with your bodies**
- Now in this chapter - **chapter 7** - Paul explains how we **honour God with our bodies**

[PowerPoint 2-Context]

- But we need to **remind** ourselves of the context
 - **Corinth** was an extremely **pagan and sexually immoral city** (not unlike **Sydney today!**)

- Many worshipped at the great **temple** of **Aphrodit-e** - the Greek **goddess of love**
- There were also many temple **prostitutes**
- There was some **weird thinking too**
 - **Some thought the body was evil** - so it **didn't matter what you did with your body** - so **any sexual immoral activity was ok** - it **just affected your body which was nothing**
 - **Others thought if the body was so evil** - **you shouldn't do even things that are natural for your body** - so if you were **married you should abstain from sexual activity with your husband or wife**
- Also, Paul is writing with the **overlying thought** (brought out in v29) - that **time is short**. Paul **believed the Lord was returning very soon**, and so his advice on marriage and singleness is **swayed by that thought**
- If you then **add to the mix** that **Paul has established a Christian church in Corinth**
 - The **Corinthian Christians are wondering** - **what should they do now** - in terms of their **sexual behaviour?**
 - If they're **married** should they **still have sex** with their **spouse?**
 - If they're **single** - **should they be getting married at all?**
 - If they're **married to an unbeliever** - **should they be divorcing their spouse** - now that they're a Christian?

So, the Apostle Paul answers these sorts of questions - and we'll look at how that relates to us - in our marriages - and in our singleness - today

[PowerPoint 3-Sections]

There are **two sections** in the chapter

1. **Instructions** to those who are **married** - & that's verses **1 to 24**
2. **Instructions** to those who are **single** - & that's verses **25-40**

Let's look at the **instructions** to those who are **married** first - vv1-24

Instructions to those who are Married (1 Cor 7:1-24)

Before we go any further - we'd better be clear on **God's definition of marriage...**

Jesus - in Mark 10:6-9 - brought together **two passages** from **Genesis** (1:27; 2:24) and said that *marriage was God-made, God bringing together a male and a female - as one flesh - for a lifelong (let no one separate), monogamous (one wife-one husband) relationship.*

[PowerPoint 4-Married]

So, to **those married...**

First up, Paul talks about sexual responsibilities within marriage - that's in vv1-7

A. Sexual Responsibilities in marriage (vv1-7)

- In v1 the **Corinthians** had asked Paul the question "*Is it good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman*". Some translations may say '**marry**' - but the **correct translation** is "**touch - sexually**".

There may have been the thinking if **sexual immorality** is so bad and so

rampant in this city - **maybe it's better to not have sex at all.**

Perhaps that's **somehow** more **super spiritual**?

- But Paul says - **sexual relations** are perfectly **fine** in the **context** of a **husband and wife** - and he's also **implying no sex before marriage** - and **no sex** with others **outside** your **marriage**
- But within the **marriage** - there is **equality** as far as **sexual activity** is concerned - the man does not own the woman or vice versa - it's **important** for the **husband and wife** to come **together sexually** and not **deprive each other** - otherwise **Satan** might **tempt** either party to look for **sexual satisfaction outside the marriage**
- **Mutual fulfilment** in sexual relations is **Paul's teaching** here - and this is quite a **normal condition of marriage**
- **Paul** himself, is **unmarried** (at this stage) and sees **singleness** as a **gift** from **God** - and **equally** he sees **marriage** as a **gift from God**

Next, Paul gives **advice** to the **unmarried about marriage** - that's vv8-9

B. Advice to the Unmarried about Marriage (vv8-9)

- Paul's advice to singles (whether never married or widowed) is that **if they don't have the gift** of remaining **single** and **burn with passion** for the person they are in love with - then it's **better to get married**
- Just because **Paul** himself has the **gift** of being able to be **single** and **celibate** - **doesn't mean he's advocating celibacy for everyone**
- **Celibacy** is a **gift from God** too - and it's not for **everyone**
- We've seen over many years how **forcing priests into celibacy** in the **RC church** has caused **horrendous consequences** to **victims of child abuse**

Next, Paul gives **advice regarding divorce** - that's in vv9-10

C. Advice Regarding Divorce (vv10-11 & Malachi 2:15-16)

- In the **context** of Corinth - with their ideas on the **body** being **evil** & the **rampant sexual immorality** - The **Corinthians** had **wondered** whether they **should stay married** - Paul's **general advice** is a husband and wife are not to separate and divorce
- **If** they do **separate** - they should either **reconcile** or **remain unmarried**
- That advice fits with **God's definition** of **marriage** as a **life-long union**
- Our **OT reading** from **Malachi 2:16** - *says God does not approve of divorce – and says that a man who hates and divorces his wife does violence to the one he should protect*
- Nevertheless, because of our **sinful human nature** - **separations** and **divorces** do happen
- When Paul says a **married couple** should not divorce
- We need to **balance Paul's teaching** with the **rest of the Bible** - and to also look at other **teachings about divorce**
 - **Jesus** says in **Matthew 19** - **divorce** is **permissible** for sexual immorality - that is - **unfaithfulness**
 - Jesus doesn't say even in the case of unfaithfulness that divorce is mandatory - **there could still be reconciliation**
 - But certainly, **for unfaithfulness** - **divorce is allowed**
 - It does beg the question - **what about a marriage where there is abuse?** - both **physical** and **emotional abuse?** Neither Paul or Jesus say anything about that?

- I would argue that **abuse** (physical or emotional) is **unfaithfulness** in the marriage too!
- **In the past - churches** may have been **guilty** of **sending battered wives back to their husbands** - when they should not have done so
- So, where a **marriage breaks** down because of **unfaithfulness** - **divorce** is **allowed** - and the **injured party** is **free** to **remarry**
- Also - Remember Ephesians 5 - says a **husband** must **love** their **wives** like Christ loves the church - how did Christ love the Church? He **died sacrificially** for the church
- So, **husbands**, need to **love** their **wives** - with a "to die for" love - they would literally die for their wives
- We also need to **understand** - that this **passage** and in fact the whole **Bible** - says very little about **marriage & divorce** between two **unbelievers?**
- However, in general terms - **God** is for **marriage** - and **God** is for **faithfulness**
- Despite of all of this - separations and divorces - do occur today.
- **You** may be **someone** in our church **family** who has been **divorced**
- I'm sure it was very **very painful** for you
- But the **Bible** also **teaches repentance and forgiveness**
- **Divorce** is not some **unforgiveable** sin that cannot be **repented of** - and it **does not mean** **God** cannot use you in the future
- For example - **Heather** and **I** have both been **married before**
 - **I wasn't a Christian** in my **first marriage**

- When I met **Heather** - she made it **clear** she **wouldn't** have **anything** to do with me - **if I wasn't a Christian** - because she **could see the problems** that may occur if two people in a marriage **aren't both believers** - both on **Jesus' page** - and she **wisely did not want to go through the same pain as her first marriage**
- **God used my divorce** for me to **become a Christian** - **God can turn a bad situation around** - and use it for **good**
- **God has also used Heather and my hurts and problems** in our first marriages - **to help others** that we've come across in **ministry** - we **praise God** for that

Next, Paul gives advice on **Mixed Marriages** - that's in verses 12-16

D. Mixed Marriages (vv12-16)

- By **mixed marriages** - we mean - where a **believer** is married to a non-believer - remember in Corinth **under Paul's ministry** - there **could be marriages** where **one** of the **spouses became a Christian** and the **other didn't**
- Paul says the **believing spouse** must not **divorce** the **unbelieving spouse**
- **Remember** - **God is for marriage**
- **Why** would a **believer** try to **keep** their **marriage** to a non-believer **together?**
- Because **God may do a work through** the **believing spouse** - sometimes the **godly and loving conduct** of the believing spouse leads their unbelieving spouse to Jesus

- Paul also says the *believing spouse* “sanctifies” the unbelieving spouse
- **Sanctified** here **doesn't mean** that the **unbelieving spouse** is saved just by being **married to a Christian**. It simply **means** that they are **set apart** for a **special working** in their lives of the **Holy Spirit**, by virtue of **being so close** to their **Christian spouse** (i.e. they **receive God's blessings** because of their **marriage to a Christian**)
- Paul also says that any **children** of this **mixed marriage** are **made holy**
- In other words - until a **child** is **old enough** to take **responsibility** for their own **relationship with Jesus** - the **child** of a **believing parent** is to be regarded as a **Christian**. The parent's “**holiness**” (through Jesus) **extends to the child**.
- This is a **beautiful assurance** that the **children of a Christian parent** are **saved**, until they become of an age of **personal accountability**.
- We have **no similar assurance** for **children of non-believing parents**. If **children of non-believing parents** are saved and go to Heaven, it is not because they are **innocent** - as we **all inherit Adam's sin** - but they are **saved** because the **rich mercy of God** has been **extended to them** as well.
- Paul **finishes** his **comments** about **mixed marriages** by saying - if the **unbelieving spouse can't handle being married to a believer** and **leaves** - **let them** leave. God has called us to **peace** in marriage - not warfare!

Next, Paul gives advice on living in the status we were called as a Christian - that's in **verses 17-24**

E. Living in the Status One was Called (vv17-25)

- Paul's advice is that **people remain** in the **status they were in** - when they first **became a Christian**
- In the **context of Corinth** - if a **circumcised Jew** became a Christian, they **shouldn't try to become uncircumcised**. And if an **uncircumcised Gentile** became a Christian, they **shouldn't seek to be circumcised like other believing Jews** (like Paul)
- Similarly, if **slaves** became a Christian, they could still **remain a slave** - but they have **freedom in Christ**, & are **free** from the **slavery to sin**. In fact, all Christians enjoy the **freedom from slavery to sin** - and become **slaves for Jesus**.
- In today's terms, it means **we don't have to change our status** radically when we **become a Christian**. Whether we are a **bricklayer** or a **CEO** of a **company** - we are **all equal in Christ Jesus** (Gal 3:28)
- The **only time** a new Christian should **seek to change** the **status** they were called in - is to **improve their conditions** - **or** where their **occupation** before they became a Christian is **incompatible with Christian principles**.

Now - the **second section** of the chapter looks at **instructions** to those who are **Single** - that's vv25-40

[PowerPoint 5-Single]

Instructions to those who are Single (1 Cor 7:25-40)

And first - Paul looks at **advice for virgins** - that's vv25-28

A. For those who are virgins (vv25-28)

- Paul's advice to virgins is influenced by what he calls the **present crisis** in v26

- This **present crisis** is the **persecution of Christians**
- So, his advice is - **because of this persecution** in Corinth -**virgins** should **remain unmarried**
- We can only **imagine** in a time of **persecution** - **having a wife and family** - how **terrible** it would be to be **tortured** and asked to "**renounce Jesus or we'll harm your wife and children**"
- However, if **virgins** do **marry** - Paul says - that's **not a sin** - but remember - being **married brings** other **troubles** and **responsibilities** that being **single** you don't have

Next Paul looks at **Investing in a Passing World** - that's vv29-31

B. Investing in Passing World (vv29-31)

- In v29 Paul says **time is short** - because he **sees Jesus' return** is **imminent**
- Paul is **not** being a **false prophet** here - he is true to **Jesus' teaching** where **Jesus taught Christians** in all ages to **be ready** and anticipate **His coming** (Matt 24:44 - *the son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect*)
- Because **time is short** - Paul **warns against over-investing in this world**
- Paul is not **encouraging** the **neglect** of our **family duties** - but living in a way where our **earthly family** is not all that **matters** - but we live with an **eye to eternity**
- And because time is short - Paul says we're not to over indulge in the feelings and things of this world - **our weeping, rejoicing and having possessions must not get in the way of following Jesus**

- Paul's argument is that there's **nothing solid and lasting in this world** - the **world is passing away** - and the world is our temporary home. Much better to **invest** in the rock-solid **foundation of Jesus for eternity**.

Next Paul looks at **singles serving God with less distractions** - that's vv32-35

C. Serving God with less Distraction (vv32-35)

- Here, Paul **simply** recognizes that when a **person doesn't have a spouse and family responsibilities** - they are "**freer**" to **serve God**. This was the **main reason Paul saw being unmarried preferable for him**
- Paul's saying when we're **married** - quite rightly a person has to be **concerned** about how to **please their spouse** - as well as God - whereas a single person - only has to **please God**
- Unfortunately, Paul's teaching here has caused the **RC Church to force singleness on their clergy** - even if they are not **gifted** to be **single!**
- And also, unfortunately, for some single Christians, **being single has become a terrible distraction** - **looking for a partner** - rather than **viewing their singleness** (whether temporary or permanent) as a special **opportunity to serve and please God**

Next Paul looks at **whether singles should marry** - that's vv36-38

D. Should they Marry? (vv36-38)

- Here Paul is either **talking to a father looking for a marriage for his virgin daughter** - or **talking to the fiancé of a virgin**
- And again, Paul says it's perfectly **fine for the virgin to marry** - especially if **passions are so strong**

- And it's also perfectly **fine not to marry**
- In fact, for Paul, the **choice** between married and single was not the choice **between good and bad** - but **between better and best**. Paul sees being **single, best**, for him, for two reasons - a) **because** of the present crisis of **persecution** in Corinth and b) being single - "**freed**" a person up - to serve the Lord - without distractions.

Finally, Paul gives **advice to widows** - that's vv39-40

E. Advice to Widows (vv39-40)

- And the advice is - a **widowed person is free to remarry** - but they **should marry a believer** ("belong to the Lord") (cf. 2 Cor 6:14)
- But again, Paul sees remaining **unmarried as preferable** - as he wants a widowed person to **consider** whether **God is calling them to a single life now** - in order to **serve Him without distractions?**

Applications

What are **we** to **make** of this **whole chapter** - there's a **whole of heap** of **teaching** here?

[PowerPoint 6-Applications]

Let me give us **3 applications** to take away this morning

1. #1 - **Marriage and singleness are gifts from God** - married people should **not** see themselves as somehow **superior** to people who are **single**. **Single** people should **not** see themselves as somehow **inferior** to those who are **married** - and should **not see** themselves as somehow **a failure**.

2. #2 - **God requires us to be faithful** in our relationship with Him -

remember the OT - pictures the **relationship** between **God** and His **people** as a **Marriage** - where **God** is always faithful - and His **people** are not always faithful - in fact **adulterous at times**.

In the NT **marriage** is a **picture** of the **relationship** between **Jesus** (as the **bridegroom**) married to His **church** - the believers (His **bride**).

God wants us to have a **faithful relationship** with Him and with His Son.

And God wants our **relationships** whether **single** or **married** - to be faithful **relationships**

3. #3 - We are to **use** our **singleness** and our **marriages** to serve God

I. **What might serving God look like** for singles?

- I. **Growing closer to God** - through **prayer**, **Bible** reading, **devotions**, and **Bible Study**
- II. **Serving others** - by **seeking** out **people** who **need** an extra set of **hands** or a **loving, compassionate friend**
- III. **Consider mission work?** - with fewer **responsibilities** a single person is **freed** up to go on **mission** in **Oz** or **overseas**
- IV. **Witnessing to other singles** - your **testimony** of being **content** in your **singleness** by **God's** grace will be a great **encouragement** to **other singles**
- V. **Praying** if you are **seeking marriage** - for a suitable **partner**
- VI. **Serving** in a **ministry** (or two) **at church**
- VII. **Practicing unconditional love in relationships** - it's not just **marriages** that need unconditional love - **family** and **friends** all

require love without necessarily receiving in return. **Practice loving without ands, ifs and buts**

II. What might serving God look like in our marriages?

- I. **Growing closer to God** - through prayer, **Bible** reading, **devotions**, and **Bible Study**
- II. **Husband and wife working together**. In the book of Acts - every time **Priscilla and Aquila** are mentioned - they are mentioned together - they were **seen not as two but one** - **two are better than one!** (Eccles 4:9-12)
- III. **Talking about spiritual matters** - not just your plans, your finances, your children, your problems and your holidays
- IV. **Modelling a Christian marriage to others watching** - a husband is to **love his wife** - like **Christ loves the church** - his wife is to love and support her husband
- V. **Serving in a ministry** (or two) at **church together**
- VI. **Connecting with other married couples** - **Christian and non-Christian**
- VII. **Raising godly children and grandchildren**

(pause)

And **that** - my friends, is what **honouring God with our bodies** looks like?

Let's pray...