**A Different View on Sex, Singleness and Marriage**

Paul is writing this in response to some specific questions….we don’t have those questions to see what the context is.

We must read this passage in light of the questions and also in light of what Paul and Jesus says in other parts of the bible.

**1 Corinthians 7:1-17**

**Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations. 2But because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.**

**3The husband should fulfill his wife’s sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband’s needs.4The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife.**

**5Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won’t be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6I say this as a concession, not as a command. 7But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another.**

**8So I say to those who aren’t married and to widows—it’s better to stay unmarried, just as I am.9But if they can’t control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It’s better to marry than to burn with lust.**

**10But for those who are married, I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. 11But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him. And the husband must not leave his wife.**

**12Now, I will speak to the rest of you, though I do not have a direct command from the Lord. If a Christian man has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to continue living with him, he must not leave her. 13And if a Christian woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him. 14For the Christian wife brings holiness to her marriage, and the Christian husband brings holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not be holy, but now they are holy. 15(But if the husband or wife who isn’t a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases the Christian husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace.) 16Don’t you wives realize that your husbands might be saved because of you? And don’t you husbands realize that your wives might be saved because of you? Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the churches.”**

Read passage and it is in response to questions. You may have more questions now than before so we will try to in these few minutes and with these time constraints unpack this.

Pauls answers to these questions are in light of this statement. Last week I talked about sexuality in terms of the creation story and the redemption story.

Let’s look at the whole letter – both letters to the Corinthians to see where the questions may be coming from.

Identity and calling and fulfillment.

Intro: Jerry MacGuire – Tom Cruise saying the line, “You complete me.” Voted most romantic line in any movie ever.

To ask or expect another human to complete us can place great strain and stress on a relationship. We can end up devouring each other.

Our society and our brains are wired to look for it in another person and yet how can a person deliver on the perfection we need to fill the gaps we have.

Rocky “I got gaps and she got gaps and together we are good.” Good line – it is true that there is a wonderful complement we can be to each other. We complement each other but we don’t complete each other.

We are looking for completion. We were made for relationship and some of it is just being human and looking for another human and some of it is

Illustrate:

**Paul answered questions from a DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW: When we “belong to Christ”, Jesus becomes our IDENTITY**

It is absolutely transformational. It is a new reality. Everything is seen through a new lens. It’s a big enough identity. It does not confine us. It will not limit us. I was made for him and by him.

He becomes our boss. Our Lord. I follow him. He is the one I take orders from. He defines me. I define my life around Him. He is so good and loving a kind and has my future in Him. He is my forgiver. I am his. He is my father. I am a son or daughter of a king. He speaks into my heart. He is who I live for. I am IN HIM. It is an uber identity.

**2 Cor 5:16b, 17 “At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How DIFFERENTLY we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”**

Before we didn’t know him. We didn’t see it right because we had the old wisdom….which is foolishness. I want to know Christ and the power of the resurrection - sharing with him in his sufferings.

**“Yes, everything else is worthless when compared to with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord….I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead.” Philippians 3:8,10**

**1 Cor 6:19, 20 “Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.”**

Last Sunday I spoke on this. A different view of the body because it is through the lens of creation and redemption

**1 Cor 11:24 “This is my body, which is given for you…”**

We see communion differently. This cost Jesus his body

**1 Cor 1:8,9 “He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be free from blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

God is doing a transformational work while we are new people.

**1 Cor 1:2 “I am writing to God’s church in Corinth, to you who have been called to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus…”**

So what if I am single? What about my sexuality? Sex is such a strong drive – is sex bad or good? Do I get married so I can have sex? Do I kill the sex drive? What about prayer and sex? What about sex in marriage? Should I have sex in marriage and be distracted from my calling as a Christ follower?

These people were grappling with this new and extremely different point of view and asking questions about how to live in light of that.

**If Jesus is my reality and identity then I can live a called and fulfilled life. Period.**

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**Philippians 4:10,11, 13 “I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything….For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”**

Jesus fills in the gaps…

**If Jesus is my reality and identity: I can be called and fulfilled and single.**

Paul was single and being used by God in unique ways.

Illustration: Auntie Donna – she didn’t live in neediness or pining around waiting for life to start.

If Jesus is the reality and identity of the church, we will not assume all in the church must be married. We will have a place in our lives for singles. We will encourage singleness as a great way to live.

If God Completes Me, then:

I can be happily fulfilled as a single person

**If Jesus is my reality and identity: He will lead me in the gift of celibacy or lead me in the gift of marriage.**

7 Both marriage and singleness are gifts from God. One is not morally better than the other, and both are valuable for accomplishing God’s purposes. It is important for us, therefore, to accept our present situation. When Paul said he wished that all people were like him (unmarried), he was expressing his desire that more people would devote themselves COMPLETELY to the ministry without the added concerns of a spouse and family, as he had done. He was not criticizing marriage – after all it is God’s way of providing companionship and populating the earth.

I don’t have to live needy. Neediness is such a turn off. It makes you live in two very discontented worlds – I am so desperate for completion that I just have to have someone to I just hate women or I just hate men.

Illustration:

If celibacy is not your gift – then get on with getting in a good situation to be married. Get off the internet and sitting watching porn which is not real with women who as portrayed do not exist. Get gainfully employed. Get a job or an education. Become a person who makes and keeps commitments in life and relationships because we need to practice that in order to be a good spouse. Be a person who is living in real life with real people and not in the basement gaming for countless hours as an escape.

Sexual pressure is not the best motive for getting married, but it is better to marry the right person than to burn with lust. Many new believers in Corinth thought that sex was wrong, and so engaged couples were deciding not to get married. In this passage, Paul was telling couples who wanted to marry that they should not frustrate their normal sexual drives by avoiding marriage. This does not mean however that people who have trouble controlling themselves should marry the first person who comes along. It is better to deal with the pressure of desire than to deal with an unhappy marriage.

**If Jesus is my reality and identity: I can be fulfilled in life with or without sex.**

This may be very different – weird – radical – but you can live without sex. It is not like food and water and shelter. It is not in that category. The media makes it sound like a person has to get laid at least like once a month. This is a strong drive but one that can be lived without.

Vs1ff Christians in Corinth were surrounded by sexual temptations. The city had a reputation even among pagans for sexual immorality and religious prostitution. It was to this kind of society that Paul delivered these instructions on sex and marriage. The Corinthians needed special specific instructions because of their cultures immoral standards. For more on Paul’s teaching on marriage go to Ephesians 5.

3-5 Sexual temptations are difficult to withstand because they appeal to normal and natural desires that God has given us. Marriage provides God’s way to satisfy these natural sexual desires and to strengthen the partners against temptation. Married couples have the responsibility to care for each other, therefore husbands and wives should not withhold themselves sexually from each other but should fulfill each others needs and desires.

Illustration: Delayed gratification and the marshmallows

I can control my sexual desires…outside and inside of marriage See 1 Cor 10:13

You can actually not have sex and be devoted to prayer. Don’t get so spiritual that you are causing the other person to be vulnerable to temptation. Be reasonable.

I can enjoy sex as a gift to give and not a right to take

Spiritually, our bodies belong to God when we become Christians because Jesus bought us by paying the price to release us from sin. Physically, our bodies belong to our spouses because God designed marriage so that, through the union of husband and wife, the two become one – Gen 2:24. Paul stressed complete equality in sexual relationships. Neither male nor female should seek dominance or autonomy.

Marriage does not solve the lust/porn problem

**If Jesus is my reality and identity: I can live called and fulfilled in an unfulfilling marriage.**

I can be content/happy and fulfilled in an unfulfilling marriage.

Disney - warm fuzzy feelings

Because of their desire to serve Christ, some people in the Corinthian church thought they ought to divorce their pagan spouses and marry Christians. But Paul affirmed the marriage commitment. God’s ideal is for husbands and wives to stay together – even when one spouse is not a believer., the spouse should try to win the other to Christ. It would be easy to rationalize leaving; however, Paul makes a strong case for staying with the unbelieving spouse and being a positive influence on the marriage. Paul, like Jesus, believed that marriage is permanent.

It is hard. There is the unbelieving spouse as an example here. Some of the people were like, “if God is going to use me and guide me then I will need to get rid of this weight. Man my wife or my husband does not love Jesus and I got to get out there and do what I’m called to.”

You are called to be a gentle peaceful person who does not ram it down their throat or….put your spiritual life on hold. You are married to that person but they are not your ultimate reality or identity. You can continue to grow, take steps of obedience like baptism and living in community with other Christ followers. Do not use your unbelieving spouse as an excuse for a convenient exit out of an unfulfilling marriage and don’t use it as an excuse to stop becoming what you were meant to become.

It may make it very challenging at times and lots of conversation but you go forward to and take responsibility for your own life. Maybe God will use you to demonstrate an upgrade of life. There is a peace that comes with reality and identity issues that are solved.

Paul is not addressing here the kind of marriage that is characterized by abuse. He is not saying to live in an intolerable situation without boundaries. There are situations where ones identity becomes completely undermined and lost. It is not doing the other person a favor to live as if nothing is wrong. There can be a very unhealthy and enabling. We need the community around us to help us gain a perspective. To make healthy decisions based on grounding our identity and reality in Christ. How to create some healthy distance where one can gain a perspective of reality and have ones identity restored. Paul was speaking to a group to a culture where women could also divorce – Jesus spoke to a culture where women could be divorced on the whim of a man. He is addressing that kind of relationship where it may be awkward because we see life through a different lens, a different viewpoint and there will bound to be some tension around that but he is not addressing abusive situations.

There will be a lack of fulfillment in not being able to pray together or to raise our kids with a common value system rooted in them knowing their identity in Christ.

Paul is challenging the thought that if I just move on and out of

1 Peter 3:1-16 your godly lives will speak to them without any words. Be tenderhearted and and keep a humble attitude. Don’t retaliate….pay back with a blessing.. That is what God has called you to do and he will bless you for it. If someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a respectful and gentle way

Every marriage goes through seasons where it seems unfulfilling - sickness, childlessness, business.

**If Jesus is my reality and identity: I will choose to marry someone who is also called and fulfilled in Jesus.**

It will be a very challenging road to go down if you choose to marry someone who does not live in the same reality as you.

I didn’t say perfect. They will have gaps. I got gaps, he or she got gaps….

Illustration – God on the top of the triangle.

Test driving a car – sexual compatibility

Having kids will complete me

I can live peacefully with my unbelieving spouse

I will carefully move toward marriage with a person whose reality and identity is in Jesus.

**Communion is a statement and desire: “I want you Jesus to be my reality and identity. I will eat and drink until contentment and fulfillment enter my soul in the situation where I am called to live.”**

Jesus – please take this cup but not my will but yours be done.