**BCM Bible Study: Oct. 9/10, 2019**

**1 Corinthians 7:1-24: Marriage, Singleness, and Learning Patience**

Looking Back (10 minutes)

Follow up on your challenge from last week, which was: “Challenge your group to do something intentional to honor God with their body.”

* Did you do anything this week to intentionally honor God with your body? What was that experience like for you?

Sex and Desire: **Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-6**

* To understand what Paul is saying here, we must consider why he said it. It is clear from v.1 that he is responding to a specific issue – what is that issue? What is his response to this Corinthians’ misunderstanding?
  + Some people in Corinth would have been very anti-material. They thought that all desires and material things were inherently unholy. Have you personally encountered this mindset? How does Paul combat it here?
  + If pleasure and material things are not inherently evil, does this give a license for giving into any desire (not just sexual, all desire)? Why or why not? How do we deal with desires in a godly way? (see special note #1 below)
* Do vv.3-6 talk about sex differently than you typically think about it? How so?
  + Like in all things, even in sex, our mindset is meant to be other-focused. Sex is a gift that you give to your spouse in the confines of marriage. What could be some of the negative results of a self-focused mindset when it comes to sex? Have you witnessed any such negative outcomes?
  + Everyone working through this study is unmarried (I think). But if you do get married, how could these verses shape the way you talk about sex with your spouse?

Marriage and Singleness: **Read 1 Cor. 7:7-9**

* Paul’s wish that all were single is certainly not a command and should be balanced by both his high view of marriage in Ephesians 5 and what he says throughout this chapter. Nonetheless, his statement would have been shocking to a Jewish audience for whom getting married was fundamental to social status.
  + Have you seen singleness devalued in the church? What does that typically look like?
  + What would it look like to value and support single people in the church?
  + Paul says that both singleness and marriage are gifts from God. Paul will say later in the letter that gifts are meant for building up the church. How can either marriage or singleness be used to build up the church? How can each group serve the other?
* **Read 1 Cor. 7:10-16** (please see special note #2 below to explain Paul’s statements about whether or not the command comes from the Lord.)
  + What is Paul’s baseline command about divorce in vv.10-11?
  + We must remember that Paul is speaking to a specific Corinthian issue here. To understand the complexities of the Christian view of divorce, we need to look at other Biblical statements about it. **Read Mark 10:11-12, Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 19:1-9, 1 Cor. 7:15**.
  + From these passages and 1 Cor. 7:10-16, how do you think Christians should biblically approach the issue of divorce? What did you learn from these passages?
    - There are many, *many* issues and questions surrounding the issues of divorce and remarriage. It is clear from Jesus (and Paul in v.15) that there are certain circumstances which permit divorce. But questions remain – what are these issues? Where do we draw the lines? We cannot develop a full theology of this issue tonight, but we can certainly affirm one thing: **The overwhelming priority in marriage is reconciliation** **– this is God’s utmost intent for marriage relationships.** Please know that there is grace surrounding this issue; no situation of divorce and remarriage is easy and without complication. We should talk about these issues with sensitivity to these complexities.
  + Why is reconciliation a godly aim for marriage relationships? How does it reflect the gospel?
  + How have you seen divorce and remarriage result in hurt and pain?
  + Look again at verses 15-16. What is Paul saying here? How have you seen God redeem broken marriages for His glory and people’s good?

Remain as you are: **Read 1 Cor. 7:17-24**

* You might be asking, “Why didn’t Paul talk about slavery more directly?” We’ll talk about that next week! What is Paul’s overall message here?
  + Paul seems to be combating a tendency to take sudden, drastic actions to change our lives, as if altering our external circumstances were the key to pleasing God. (Craig Blomberg) Instead, God often asks us to be patient and faithful where we are. However, this does not allow for passivity! Paul’s encouragement to slaves to gain freedom balances out his statement.
  + Have you been tempted to change something about a life circumstance in an effort to please/honor God? (i.e. major, job, living situation, etc.) How can we go about deciding whether or not we should act on this desire?
  + How does this mindset shape the way you think about romantic relationships?

Conclusion:

Romantic relationships define neither our identity nor our ability to serve God. Instead, we are called to serve out of whatever place we are in. This is true not only for our romantic relationships but for all facets of life. Instead of rushing into a place where we think we can better serve God, we should consider how we can build up others where we currently are. Consider these challenges for the week:

* + If you are dating…
    - Do something outward focused together. How can you love someone else or the community together even if in a small way?
    - Schedule a time to spend away from each other where you can each be with God. Come together and talk about it.
  + If you are single…
    - Do something outward focused. How can you love someone else or the community together even if in a small way?
    - Schedule a time to spend with God, asking him to give you the contentment you desire. Ask him how he wants you to love Him and others as you currently are.

**Special Notes:**

1. Even if vv.2 and 5 are taken as a reason for *getting* married, it is not the only or even primary reason for doing so mentioned in this chapter. It must be balanced with Paul’s charge later in the chapter not to rush into a relationship status change. Rather, this is a response to a certain group of people and his statement sets the table for vv.3-7. (Craig Blomberg)
2. Paul’s statements in v.10 and v.12 confuse many. It seems as if one statement should be taken seriously and the other is just Paul’s opinion, but that is not what is happening here. In v.10, Paul is directly alluding to the words of Jesus (see Mark 10:11-12). When Paul says “I, not the Lord” in v.12, he means that he is no longer alluding directly to what Jesus said. Jesus did not speak to every conceivable issue, so Paul did not have his direct statement about every topic. A similar issue will arise in v.25, but we should again balance these statements with Paul’s strong statement of inspiration in v.40. Why Paul felt the need to clarify this is unclear – perhaps it was a sensitive issue – but to question Paul’s authority is to misunderstand his intent.
3. V.14 is another confusing one. This does not mean that children are saved simply be being in a Christian family or having a Christian parent. The rest of the Bible doesn’t leave room for that and Paul uses a different word in 15 (holy) than 16 (save). This is best understood to mean that a child with a Christian parent is “set apart,” meaning that they are in a special place of receiving God’s blessing, the influence of a Christian parent.