**BCM Bible Study: Oct. 23/24, 2019**

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

Looking Back: What were your take-aways from the FTLT study on spiritual disciplines?

Have a Singular Focus: You read this section 2 weeks ago, but we are going to read it again because it sets up for the second half of the chapter. **Read 1 Cor. 7:17-24**

* Look again at vv.18-19. What is Paul saying here?
* Since circumcision is an Old Testament commandment, what does it mean to keep God’s commandments?
  + **Read Matthew 5:17-20, 22:34-40; Romans 10:1-4, 13:8-10.** What does it look like to fulfill the law in modern times?
  + What is Paul suggesting that we *not* do?
    - **Note:** At this point, it is important that everyone understand the gist of the argument. In short, Paul is saying that your external situation does not enable you nor disqualify you from living an effective Christian life. To be unmarried, married, circumcised or not – none of these things is the essence of what it means to be a Christian. Rather, Christian life has to do with *how* we live in any given situation.
* Now, focusing on vv.21-24, how does Paul apply this same message to slaves and free people? (see note #1 about Paul’s perceived lack of boldness against slavery)
  + Regardless of whether someone was a slave or free person, he tells them not to become slaves of human beings (v.23). What does that mean?
  + What human relationships (son/daughter, sibling, employee, student) or positions of status (leader, club president, etc.) carry the most weight in your life? In what way do these relationships shape the way you make decisions and spend time?
  + Do you ever sense that any of these relationships compete with your relationship with God? What would it look like (or does it looks like) for your relationship to God to be your top priority? What would change for you?

Message to the Unmarried: **Read 1 Cor. 7:25-31**

* For the phrase “I have no command from the Lord” and Paul’s comment on “virgins” see special notes 2 and 3. V.36 can be particularly interesting, so see #3 if needed.
* Paul gives 2 reasons for people to remain as they are – what are they? (v. 26 and 28)
  + The present crisis was not likely a political crisis of some sort – Corinth was prospering when this letter was written. Instead, the crisis is the unknown time of the Lord’s return. Many think that Paul thought that Christ would return during his lifetime, and he may well have thought that – Jesus is clear that only the Father knows that information. Nonetheless, we are called to live our lives with a sense of urgency, knowing that Christ could return at any moment.
* What are the implications of Christ’s second coming? What will this mean for us and all of mankind?
  + Do you ever think about the unknown timing of Christ’s second coming? How does this impact your life?
  + How does Paul say we should live in light of this reality? (vv.29-31)
    - Which of Paul’s four statements stand out to you the most? Why?
  + In what way do you tend to become engrossed in concerns of this life? How does this impact you spiritually?
  + Do you think that Paul means that we should try to be involved in the world as little as possible? Why or why not?
    - How does Jesus model a healthy balance?
* **Read 1 Cor. 7:32-35**
  + In what way are these verses contrary to the way you might have experienced Christians value marriage?
  + In one way, this paragraph resonates with modern culture (the idea that marriage is restricting), but in what way is it contrary to the way some people think?
    - Many don’t want to marry because it will restrict their plans. But for Paul. to be free of marital concerns is to be free to serve the Lord, not your own interests or career path.
  + Paul calls for undivided devotion to the Lord. Why is this difficult for people who are unmarried?
  + Given what Paul has said here, how should a married person live out what he says in v.29?
* **Read 1 Cor. 7:36-40** (again, see note #3 for difficulty with v.36)
  + What does Paul say in these verses?
  + Throughout this chapter, Paul’s basic stance is that to remain single is better, even saying in v.35 that it is “for your own good.” For many single people who want to get married this statement is difficult to swallow. We must also see that throughout the chapter, Paul concedes that marriage is also good and God-pleasing. Neither is wrong, but singleness has some advantages with regard to undivided devotion to the Lord.
    - How should we wrestle with the desire for a significant other and Paul’s statements about singleness in this chapter? What should we consider?
  + What does it look like to honor God either in singleness or marriage?

**Conclusion:** Part of the overall message of this section is that human relationship/concerns can often overshadow our primary concern, which is to know God and do His will. The primary example in this chapter is marriage, but it applies to all areas of our life. To help assess what this looks like for you, complete the “Relational Priority Assessment” and be prepared to talk about it next week.

* **Note #1:** It is puzzling to many why Paul did not speak out more boldly against slavery. A number of factors need to be considered:
* Twice in this passage, (second half of v.21 and v.23) Paul *does* say that to be free is better than to be a slave.
* In Philemon, Paul is asking for spiritual relationships to be considered as more significant than fleshly relationships in the slave-owner relationship. He asks Onesimus, the slave-owner, to receive his slave (Philemon) back “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.” (Phil. 1:16)
* Slavery was a *massive* institution in the Roman Empire while the church was relatively tiny. Nonetheless, what Paul *does* say to Christian slave-owners and masters is highly counter-cultural.
* Slavery in Rome, while not a positive thing, should not be thought of as analogous to U.S. slavery. Slaves could earn freedom and some even chose not to because of the stability slavery offered.
* Paul’s overall mood in his letters is urgency, especially in this chapter. Because of this urgency, he was most concerned with the spiritual well-being of the church. He clearly cares about the physical state of a person, but it is secondary for Paul due to the eternal consequences of someone’s spiritual state. He uses the same principle in Philippians 4 when talking about poverty and wealth.
* **Note #2:** When Paul says “I have no command from the Lord” in v.25, he means that he is not alluding directly to what Jesus has said. Jesus did not speak to every conceivable issue, so Paul did not have his direct statement about every topic; we should balance this 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.
* **Note #3**: In v.25 and throughout vv.25-40 there is a translational difficulty, especially v.36. Some versions say “virgin,” “betrothed,” “fiancée,” or “young woman.” Don’t let this trip you up – the general idea is that Paul is speaking of young people of marriable age. In v.36, some versions make is sound like a man is doing something inappropriate with his daughter, but I do not believe this is the intent. Instead, Paul is again affirming that sex is acceptable only within marriage and that marriage itself is a God-honoring choice.