



Weekly Devotional

A large, solid red heart graphic that serves as a background for the ampersand in the title.

YOU & Me

Relationships in
a Modern World

A photograph of two hands, one from the left and one from the right, positioned to form a heart shape. The hands are light-skinned and the background is a bright blue sky with white clouds.

January 23 - 27, 2012

Questions & Prayers

1 Corinthians 7

1. How might you explain the problems or issues that Paul is dealing with in this chapter?
2. What in this chapter might be the most surprising to someone reading it for the first time?
3. What principles and guidelines does Paul offer concerning (a) whether to get married and (b) how to live if you're already married?
4. Look at the common theme in verses 17, 20, and 24. How would you say this teaching applies to your life now?
5. Compare what Paul says about marriage in this chapter with what he says in the following passages. How do these teachings fit together? Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 3:18-19, 1 Timothy 3:2, 3:12 and 5:14.

This week take time to pray for some of the individuals and Organizations that Glenkirk supports:

- Stephen Lungu (African Enterprises/Africa)
- Shukri & Adam (Habibi/Arabic Broadcasting/Duarte, CA)
- Bryant & Anne Wilhemens (Go Ye Fellowship/Germany)
- Jody & Chany Pine (Navigations/China)
- Peace Nnihorembere (Tizah International/Burundi/Africa)
- Michael & Tiffany Jeter (Christian World Outreach/Burkina Faso/W Africa)
- Anton & Joann Bucher (Wycliffe/USA)



Monday

1 Corinthians 7:1-7



These were actually very radical words in Paul's day. The customs of his day were very much like those in parts of the Middle East today. A woman was basically the property of her husband. He was pretty free to do with her and to her as he pleased. Paul, though, here says that our bodies actually belong to our spouse. Even today this is radical. Today we are trained to think about ourselves over the other. The most common argument for abortion is: "It is my body. I have a right to make decisions that regard my body." Paul is saying, "Not so." How many of our relationship problems would be solved if we really put the other person before ourselves—and not just in marriage, but with our parents, children, and neighbors.

In this chapter Paul focuses on the need for sexual purity. Corinth was a port city. In fact, it had two ports. It was located on a narrow isthmus where ships would pull into port on the east side of town, offload their cargo, and have it taken by land three miles to the western port where it was loaded on ships bound for Rome. With all of those sailors and passengers, prostitution was a lucrative industry. In addition, the worship of the various Greek and Roman Gods involved temple prostitution. Sexual purity was practiced by very few.

God, though, calls for sexual purity. And Paul is asking those in the church to put safeguards into their lives in order to make sure they do not give into the temptation to have sex outside of marriage. Many today fall into temptation. On the other hand, because many today know their limitations, they put safeguards into their lives. For example, it is said that Billy Graham never entered a hotel room by himself, and he didn't enter first. Furthermore, he always had a male team member with him when he traveled. Sexual impurity has been the downfall of many a ministry, ruining many marriages and scarring many children.

Sexual impurity comes in many other forms: pornography, books, and movies. What safeguards do you need to put into your life? How might you encourage a single person to be sexually pure?

Tuesday

1 Corinthians 7:8-16



We live in a society that, from a social perspective, almost requires marriage. Marriage is a great gift from God. God gave us marriage because He is a relational God. He lives in relationship and knows that we also need relationship. But marriage is not of first importance. Of first importance is doing the Kingdom work that we are called to do.

Paul knew this, and so he cautioned his readers not to spend their time worrying about finding a spouse, but rather to focus on doing God's work and allowing God to bring them the gift of a spouse. (After all, He created marriage and wants to give His children good gifts.) But having said this, many were now so involved in Kingdom work that their marriages were suffering. To these Paul says that one's marriage is extremely important, even if it is to a non-believer. In fact, the Kingdom work one might be called to is the witnessing to and praying for that unbelieving spouse. If we are married, our Kingdom work begins at home, showing Jesus' love to those in our family. By the way, it is always important to distinguish between "church" work and "kingdom" work. They are often the same, but sometimes we find ourselves so involved at doing work at church that we are not available to respond to God's interruptions to do Kingdom work. God is concerned with relationships first and programs second.

Marriage enables us to model, understand, and grow in God's relationship to us and our relationship to God. God is faithful; He will never abandon us. He loves us with an unconditional love that forgives us and desires the best for us. He loves us with a sacrificial costly love poured out through the giving of His Son Jesus that we might have abundant life. In our relationships with others, we learn how to be more like God. In our relationships with others, we grow in being able to give back to God as He gave to us. All of us need a foundation under our lives. God is that foundation, and He wants our relationships to help too.

Have you been tempted to give up on a relationship God has called you to? What might you do to strengthen the relationships you have?

Wednesday



1 Corinthians 7

As you read this chapter this week, ask yourself, “What is behind the words? What concerns, problems, situations, and questions existed in the church that Paul is here addressing?” Answering those questions will help you get a handle on Paul’s argument and properly apply it to today’s situations. This is important because all too often this chapter has been misapplied or misunderstood; the Bible has a lot more to say about marriage and relationships than what we read here. All too often, though, we read Scripture looking for loopholes so that we can do what we desire rather than living by God’s principles.

For example, marriage and sex are God-given gifts. But like all gifts, Satan’s desire is to exploit them. Today even our Christian youth and many of their parents try to make a case (or an excuse) for premarital sex. Widows and widowers often seek to make a case for living together without marriage because of the financial implications involved in marriage. Those who believe that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle will say, “God gave me these urges, so they must be okay.” I have often heard someone rationalize divorce by saying, “God would not want me to live like this, being this unhappy.” Paul is writing to set the record straight in various situations, laying down God-given principles.

Verses 25-28 can be hard to understand. In Jesus’ day one was pledged to be married for a period of time before the wedding actually took place. We might call it an engagement, but to break off such a pledge was akin to divorce. It was to this “in between” situation that Paul is referring. Besides this, generally a parent or guardian would have the responsibility of “arranging” a marriage. Paul is here releasing them from this responsibility.

And what does it mean that one’s non-believing spouse is “sanctified.” This does not mean “saved” but it does mean “blessed.” The spouse receives the blessings of prayer and the Holy Spirit’s inspired fruit of the Spirit. And Paul adds that the children are full members of the covenant community even if only one parent believes.

God does not hold us accountable for what we do not understand in Scripture, but He does hold us responsible for what we do understand. Where are you trying to find loopholes in God’s principles? Is there something in which God is calling you to be obedient that you are avoiding?

Thursday

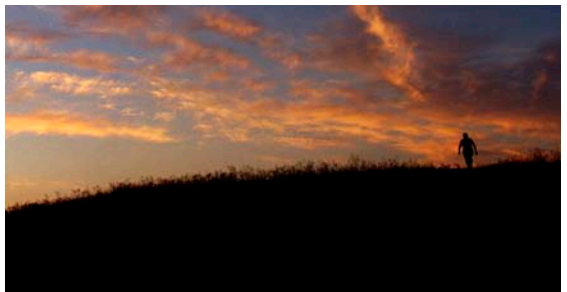
1 Corinthians 7:17-39, 1 Peter 3:1-2

Paul here calls us to be content in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. Sometimes God has initiated those circumstances for some purpose we do not yet understand. When we are in a situation, God is able to work things together for the good for us and for His Kingdom.

In Paul's day many who came to know Jesus as their Savior were slaves. In Jesus they learned that they were not property, but they had great value. Some of these slaves were free to use their gifts in the church as though they were free, and they naturally longed for further freedoms. In some cases, these slaves had Christian masters and began treating their masters more like brothers than masters. In other situations a wife or a husband would come to a relationship with Jesus but her (his) spouse continued to worship the local deity. This often created friction in the home. People would point to the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah, who called for purity in marriage (Jews only being married to other Jews) and wrongfully surmised that they should leave their non-believing spouse. Paul here writes to correct these abuses.

I once saw a poster of four cows, all with their heads through a fence, eating the grass in the next cow's pasture. Is not the "grass always greener on the other side of the fence"? Paul is not saying to the slave, "Remain a slave even if you have a chance to be free." But he is saying, "Don't waste valuable time and energy striving to be free. God has a purpose for you right where you are." Today we say things like, "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade" or "Bloom where you are planted." To the married person, Paul stresses that even though it is not God's desire that you be unequally yoked, if you are, you have a great opportunity to be a blessing to your spouse. God did not turn His back on us when we were walking away from Him; but instead, through Jesus, He sought us out and loved us sacrificially.

Where are you wasting valuable time and energy trying to change something rather than seeking God in the midst of your situation. Is it possible that God is actually working your present circumstance to some eternal good either for you or for others around you?



Friday

1 Corinthians 7:25-39



In verse 25 Paul says that he has “no command from the Lord.” Paul is stressing that his words come from his understanding of the times, not from a hard and fast rule of God. For Paul, the times were filled with persecution. He had an expectation that Jesus would return at any time. There was urgent ministry work that needed to be accomplished, and he cautioned people against anything that would distract them from accomplishing this work. The world is filled with distractions (advertisers make a living at distracting us). Every commitment has its own encumbrances. If I have a mortgage or a car payment, I am no longer free to give as much money away to those in need, and I have a whole set of worries when my job is in jeopardy.

A spouse and children are great gifts of God, but during times of persecution especially, they provide a whole extra layer of stress. Thus, Paul writes that being single is not all that bad. Being single frees one up to spend more time doing Kingdom work. But Paul cautions: not everyone has the gift of celibacy. For those without the gift, they should get married. But those who are able to remain celibate are free to give more time and energy to the urgent work of the Kingdom.

These words were as counterintuitive in Paul’s day as they are today. But there are lessons that we need to take to heart today just as Paul’s readers needed to change their thinking. First, marriage and family are not the final goal in life; Jesus is. We often forget this. Second, if one is single, rather than being worried about finding a partner, one is better served by finding a ministry and giving more of one’s time to the spread of God’s Kingdom. Finally, we need to applaud those who are single as much as we applaud those who are married. Many singles feel left out rather than included.

How might you apply this passage to your life today? Might you befriend and encourage someone who is single? Maybe rather than encumbering your life with more “toys” that need to be cared for, it’s time to say “no” or downsize? Are you honestly focused on God or the transitory pleasures of this life?



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