**1 Corinthians 7 – March 14**

Welcome to a new week with the Corinthian church. This week we will continue to see the variety of ways the pride of the Corinthians had begun to infest the church resulting in patterns of sin. In today’s chapter, the main focus is on marriage, singleness, and divorce. (If you normally have children reading these along with you, it would be wise to read it in advance because of some of the content regarding marriage issues.

It is important not to fall off of the path on either side of this issue. We are not to view singleness or marriage as required or superior. As Paul says of marriage and singleness in verse 7, “But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.” In this chapter there are many occasions when Paul highlights the value of singleness as it relates to ministry. And there are multiple times that he states that it is his personal suggestion to remain single.

It is incredibly important to see that this is a suggestion, not a command. And, you will notice that is unique to the circumstances at that church in those days. He states in verse 26, “I think that **in view of the present distress** it is good for a person to remain as he is.” We don’t know exactly what that distress was. Most likely it was a form of persecution that was resulting in husbands being imprisoned and separated from their wives. That is why, for example, Paul recommends that widows not be remarried in this book, while he says the exact opposite in 1 Timothy 5:14, “So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.” The present distress that the church was encountering required unique consideration for those who were going to marry. Even so, notice that Paul never forbids marriage.

Are you single? This chapter tells you that your singleness is a gift. (vs. 7) That may be a gift that God grants you for your entire life. It may just be for a season. This chapter encourages those who are single to take full advantage of their freedom from familial responsibilities to serve the body of Christ with zeal and fervor.

This chapter also speaks about the proper view of sex within marriage. The world has a completely backwards and distorted image of what sex is all about. In the world’s view, it is all about taking. It is about getting pleasure for yourself. It is selfish. But, according to this chapter, we are to view sex within marriage as a way to give of yourself. It is designed to serve your spouse. It can be easy to read the first five verses of this chapter almost as a dry, legal arrangement if you do not see the beauty of prioritizing giving of yourself rather than taking of another. It is also key to see that there are genuine spiritual dangers if you fail to love each other in that way. (vs. 5)

For further study: Here is a short, thought-provoking article regarding verse 22. If you are asking yourself, “Where is the gospel in this chapter?” This is an excellent article to encourage your soul. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-best-form-of-slavery>

**1 Corinthians 8 – March 15**

If your Bible is similar to mine, then there is probably a subtitle to this chapter that says something like “Food Sacrificed to Idols.” Once again, we are observing how pride has damaged the church in Corinth and produced all sorts of others sins. In this case, the chapter may be better titled something like “Loving the Weaker Brother” or “Prioritizing the Conscience of Others.” (Nobody has ever accused me of being good at clever titles.)

**The Specific Problem**

In the Greco-Roman world, there was a much different pattern for purchasing groceries than we experience today. Instead of going to Stop and Shop and picking up a half pound of sliced ham, you would have to get your meat from whatever butcher shop would provide you with your needs. But, there was a catch. Every Greek and Roman city would have at least one temple. Usually the city would be dedicated to a specific pagan deity. These large temples (and their many employees) would be sustained by way of collaborating with the vendors of the city. There were many ways that this form of commerce was mutually beneficial on an economic level, but we don’t have time to explore most of that today. What you need to know is simply this. If you purchased a pound of mutton at your local corner store in Corinth, part of your purchase would be dedicated to the temple and the god that it represents. Think of it like the original sales tax. Other cities would first take part of the animal to the temple and bring the rest to their store to sell. They could then say that the meat would be blessed because half of the cow was donated to Minerva or Apollo or Jupiter. People would intentionally make their purchases from places that were dedicated to their favorite deity. It was a form of worship to these false gods. So, what should a believer do after coming to Christ? Should they eat this food or not? Paul makes it clear (both here and later in the book) that there is nothing sinful about eating meat, regardless of what pretend god it has been offered to. However, just because you have freedom to do something, doesn’t mean that it is loving to do it…

**The Heart of the Problem**

I once spoke with a friend who had been saved out of the music world. He was involved with very heavy rock music. When he because a Christian, he could not listen to that style of music without some of the old emotions and desires returning to him. Even if the lyrics were pure, Christian, God-glorifying words, he could not listen to that music without leading his heart toward sin. How should his fellow believers who enjoy that kind of music respond? They should prefer this brother whose conscience was weak.

Similarly, I know of a woman who had been saved and brought out of alcoholism. On multiple occasions when she went to a gathering with some of the people at her church, people would bring and offer her beer. (Please do not do this at our gatherings.) This led her into sin multiple times. When she spoke to her small group leader about it, he told her that she was being legalistic by asking others not to drink in her presence. That was wrong and damaging to her soul.

These brothers in Corinth were genuinely struggling because of their past with food sacrificed to idols. And when they saw other people in the church exercising their freedom in Christ, it caused them spiritual harm. You find the bottom line in verse 12, “Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, **you sin against Christ**.”

**Application**

Just because you have the freedom in Christ to do something, and just because it doesn’t wound your conscience, that doesn’t mean it is good for the body of Christ. Although Christ has given us freedom, that freedom is to be employed in loving others. Our freedom is not to be a tool to get whatever we want. Therefore, if there is something that is causing your brother to stumble, don’t demand your freedom over their spiritual well-being. Instead be like Paul who said that he would rather become a vegetarian than make these weaker brothers stumble.

For your encouragement: This is a song that always reminds me of the personal love that Christ showed me at the cross. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RG2rSWYdD2A>

**1 Corinthians 9 – March 16**

Yesterday we began to see Paul’s argument about laying down our rights in order to love others. Paul uses his own relationship with them in order to illustrate how he has already modeled this kind of thinking for them.

**Paul’s Example**

Paul begins by reminding them that he has particular rights as an apostle. In particular, that apostles are to be financially supported by the churches for whom they care and over which they minister. He goes so far as to compare this to both false religions and pack animals. Even pagan temples feed their workers. And even oxen get to eat some of the grain as they work. But, the Corinthian people cared so much about money that Paul and Barnabas never asked for a penny. Why? Because they didn’t want to “put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.” Paul is not trying to make them feel guilty. Rather, he is attempting to show them that the gospel empowers us to lay down our rights for the good of the kingdom.

**All Things to All Men**

Perhaps the most misused portion of this chapter is the phrase “I have become all things to all me.” This is often used in regards to cultural aspects of churches or missionary contexts. In many cases, it could easily be traded for the phrase, “When in Rome do as the Romans do.” However, that is not at all what is being said here. The point that Paul is making is not that he is trying to blend in. If you just read the book of Acts you will see that he never blends in. He is not trying to become like them. He is laying down his rights so as not to offend them.

Here is a good example. Timothy was brought into the ministry alongside Paul. His father was Greek, and therefore Timothy was uncircumcised. As we have already read from Galatians, circumcision does not have any bearing on salvation. However, so as to be more effective in ministering to the Jewish people (who would have asked about his status of circumcision), Timothy willingly gave up his freedom and underwent a surgery in order to be more effective in preaching the gospel. (You can read that story in Acts 16:1-3.) By saying that Paul would live as one under the law means that he would observe the ritual washings before entering the temple or cut his hair in accordance with Jewish traditions (among other things) in order to avoid unnecessarily offending his fellow Jews. The gospel will offend. The goal is that **we** would not be offensive, turning people away from Christ. We never want to become a hindrance to the kingdom by flaunting our freedom.

**Live Like an Athlete**

Paul parallels our Christian life to running a race. He highlights that, just as a runner exercises control “in all things,” so must we cut away any unhelpful, sinful, or unloving practices. For these proud Corinthians, Paul was probably still focusing in on their unwillingness to give up food sacrificed to idols. But, it leaves us with a helpful question. Is there anything that you have allowed into your life that bogs down your Christian race toward heaven? Is there any sin or pride that has developed. If so, lay it aside so that you might run for the imperishable reward.

**1 Corinthians 10 – March 17**

7 Quick thoughts from 1 Cor. 10.

1. **Associated with the people of God does not mean that you have association with God**

Paul begins this chapter with 5 verses about how ALL of the Israelites performed certain actions together. There are 5 times it says ALL of them did something. Yet, not all of them pleased God. Paul is bringing this before the people of Corinth because he is concerned for their souls. He is making clear that not everyone who professes faith, or attends church services, or gives fincancially, or gets baptized will actually enter into heaven. Just as the Israelites that proved by their actions that they did not trust God, so too our actions reveal whether we are living for Him or for ourselves.

1. **The Rock was Christ**

It is interesting to note that the rock “followed” the Israelites. This is something that is only made clear now that we reach the New Testament. If you remember, in Exodus 17:6, God told Moses to strike the rock, and it gave water to Israel. Later, in Numbers 20:8-11, God tells Moses to speak to the rock to bring forth water. He struck it again, and that was the reason he was not permitted to enter the promised land. Why? Because the Rock was Christ, and the striking of the Rock was supposed to be a picture of the gospel. The Son of Man was only to suffer once for all. After that, the water of life would flow freely. There should never again be an attempt to crucify the Lord of Glory.

1. **Written for our Instruction**

Verse 11 tells us that these things are written for our instruction. What things? Verses 6-10 highlight the most devastating events of Exodus and Numbers. What does this tell us about the Old Testament? It teaches us that we are not to leave it behind or consider it to be without value. For our sake these things have been recorded.

1. **Don’t Grow Complacent Against Temptation**

Verse 12 speaks to all of us as a warning. If you think you are above any particular kind of sin, think again. In your flesh, you are capable of great wickedness. Take sin and temptation seriously. “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

1. **There is ALWAYS a Way of Escape**

Verse 13 provides for us a wonderful promise. God will never allow us to be tempted to the extent that we are incapable of honoring Christ. There is always a possibility for escape and endurance. Don’t miss the key point of this verse. It is not a way to pump you up and say, “You got this! you can do it! You are tough enough for anything the world could throw at you.” No, the key of the verse is this: God is faithful. He is the one that allows you to experience temptation. He is the one that holds His children fast through temptation. He is the one that always provides a way to reject temptation. Here is the good news. You never have to sin again. As a Christian, you have the power of God to reject sin every time. Not in your own power, but by leaning on the power of Jesus our Savior.

1. **Food Sacrificed to Idols Revisited**

In verses 14-22 it almost appears backwards from what Paul previously stated in this book about food sacrificed to idols. Before he said that it was no big deal to eat it, unless it caused someone to stumble. Now he is saying that to eat this food is a form of provoking God to jealously. (vs 22) What changed? The difference is that now Paul is talking to anyone in the church who was trying to have their cake and eat it too. He is calling out those who profess Christ, but also continue to worship idols in the way they did before they came to Christ. He is telling them not to participate in the worship of these false gods. He goes so far in vs. 20 to say that doing so is a form of demon worship.

1. **Rightly Exercising Christian Liberty**

There are two key principles in verses 23-33 regarding how we determine where to draw the line regarding our Christian liberties.

* 1. Verse 23 says, ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up.” The first principle given is about how your actions affect the body of Christ. You are not a lone ranger Christian. Your actions have ripple effects through the entire church. The first principle given in this chapter that helps us determine how to live is to ask the questions, “Are these actions helpful to the souls of others? Do these actions build up, edify, and strengthen the brethren?” If they do not, or if they are detrimental to the body, for the sake of the church, don’t indulge.
	2. Verse 31, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” This is the most important criteria for whatever you do in life. If you are engaging in activity that is not glorifying to the Lord, cut it out of your life. For the sake of Christ, remove it.

**1 Corinthians 11 – March 18**

Welcome to chapter 11. Here we find one of the most obscure parts of this letter, and one of the most common. Let’s consider three main things from this text.

1. **Imitate Me…**

When I am trying to teach my children something, it is best to show them how to do it first. During our renovation of the parsonage, there were many opportunities to show my kids how to swing a hammer or use an electric drill. I would be a terrible father if I just handed them my tools and said, “Have at it, kid. Don’t break anything.” I need to walk through it with them and show them how to use the tool correctly and safely.

In a similar way, Paul is helping the Corinthians who never met Jesus in the flesh by saying, “Just look at how I imitate Jesus, and do that.” Notice what Paul does not say. He does not simply say, “Imitate me.” If he did that, then he would have been placing himself above his station. Moreover, Paul was a sinner, just like you and I. He needed the grace of God and the forgiveness of others on occasion. He is not saying to imitate everything he has ever said or done. He is only stating, “in those ways that I have learned to live like Jesus, and in the ways that I have been changed by Him, imitate those things.

1. **Head Coverings**

This is one of the more challenging parts of the New Testament for me to understand. It is also a passage that has been hotly debated in the past. Here is my understanding of what is being said. I believe that the head coverings being mentioned here are referring to hair. That is why Paul shifts seamlessly into discussing hair length in verses 14-15. But, why would Paul take such great focus on this issue? I think this is why: just like in our modern society, there were women who were attempting to be masculine in order to be considered “equal.” That is why Paul takes such great efforts to remind the church about the ordained order of the family with the wife living in submission to the husband.

There is no verse in the New Testament that I understand less than verse 10. I have read many different perspectives on it, and none of them seem right to me. That doesn’t mean that I will give up. I hope and pray that as I continue to come back to this verse year after year that the Lord will open my understanding and give me wisdom.

1. **The Lord’s Supper**

The Corinthian church was not only filled with sin. They were wild. There was no order to the practice of the Lord’s Supper. Some of the people were using it as their dinner. Others were drinking so much wine that they were getting drunk. And all of this was being done when many were not yet able to gather. This lack of ability was probably either due to geographical difficulties, or work schedules. Either way, you can see how that would be an easier wedge in the unity of the church. If it was due to geography, then it was probably the city folks who were present whilst the country folks and suburban dwellers were still making their way in. If it was owing to work schedules (which I find more likely), then the wealthy would be the ones who were primarily capable of choosing their schedules while the poor and servant classes would have had limited ability to manage their own time. Regardless, the main issue that Paul rejects is not the drunkenness, but the disunity of the brothers at the table. Paul then instructs the people with the very famous words that we read publicly each month regarding how to partake in a worthy manner.

**1 Corinthians 12 – March 19**

We have seen so far that the Corinthians had found a way to let the sin of pride distort and pervert so many of the gifts of God (such as evangelists, marriage, and the Lord’s Supper, to name a few). Now we are going to move into a section from chapters 12-14 where Paul reveals that the Corinthians have even discovered a way to distort the spiritual gifts that God had bestowed upon them by becoming proud of them. Today let’s consider three quick notes about the gifts spoken about in verses 1-11 and three notes about the unity of the body spoken about in verses 12-31.

**Spiritual Gifts**

1. The core concept of spiritual gifts is that they are GIFTS. They are not natural talents or skills, although to an outsider they may appear that way sometimes. Spiritual gifts are forms of supernatural empowerment in the believer to carry out a particular ministry for the good of the body of Christ. You can’t brag about something if it was a gift. You can only give glory to the Giver. According to verse 11, it is God the Holy Spirit who apportions these gifts according to His, not ours.
2. There are four lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament, and none of them match. None of them are comprehensive. It is likely that Paul singled out these specific spiritual gifts because (as we will see in chapter 14) some of the Corinthians who had these gifts were looking down on those who did not. They had found a way to use what God had given them as a way to elevate their perception of themselves and minimize their perception of others.
3. Verse 8 tells us that the gifts are given “for the common good.” In context, this seems to be a reference to the common good of the church community. And, in particular, this was a way for Paul to once again cut down their pride by eliminating any grounds for personal advancement because of their gifting. Simply put, Paul is saying, “God did not give you these gifts so you could bless yourself, but so that you could bless others. Let’s do that very thing with the various gifts apportioned to each of us.

**Unity in the Body**

1. We often speak about the church using the term “the body.” This is the chief text from which that terminology is derived. Paul compares the church to a living corpus that requires various anatomical components in order to function. This explains why God does not give everyone the same gift. He desires for the church to be so jointly unified that ever member of the body serves the good of another.
2. We see the issues of disunity and arrogance clearly by the way Paul speaks of the various body parts in his extensive metaphor. Some in the church were looking at others and saying, “I have no need of you.” That is a vile and disturbing attitude of the heart. Have you ever felt that toward any of your brothers or sisters in Christ? Truly those who seem to the outside world to be less honorable are the most indispensable to us. Don’t imagine yourself superior.
3. The glorious image of this metaphor is not just that we are the body. The glorious image is that Paul refers to Christ as the head of the body. (vs. 27) This image is used to reveal that everything that we do should be to bring honor and praise to Jesus Christ.

And Paul closes this chapter of correction by previewing what we will consider tomorrow by contrasting all of the sinful pride and disunity that they have been experiencing with the way of love found in chapter 13. That is why he closes out this chapter by saying, “I will show you a still more excellent way.” We will dig into that excellent way next week. ☺