

**Further reflection and discussion material**  
**The Church THEN and NOW**  
**The challenge of sexual relationships, marriage and singleness**  
**1 Cor 7:1-40**

**(1) Background:**

In Ray's sermon last weekend, ( <https://www.gwac.org.au/sermons> ) he outlined for us

- A. two contemporary observations (we live in a sex obsessed and drenched world and our society's 'take' or view on sex is alien and possibly hostile to the church)
- B. two dangers in seeking to define a biblical stance – on the one hand a very conservative and prudish position on sex and say that it is only for having children and therefore we should not talk about it in the public gathering and on the other hand take a very liberal stance and accept the views in total, of society.
- C. 4 propositions that help us see what a Biblical stance is and these four propositions are summarized by this: "Faithfulness within marriage and chastity (abstinence) outside of marriage."
- D. 5 'takeaways' from the text of 1 Cor 7:1-40 to help us navigate and live within our contemporary society as followers of Jesus.
  - a. Have sexual relations regularly within your marriage
  - b. Singleness is a good gift from God
  - c. Divorce is serious and tragic, while recognizing there are grounds for divorce
  - d. If your spouse is not a Christian, enjoy the marriage and foster the relationship
  - e. Be content 'as you are'

**(2) Further reflection and discussion opportunities:**

- During Ray's sermon, when speaking about one member of the married couple being dissatisfied or concerned about an aspect of their marriage, he suggested the best way to respond is to initiate conversation about it.
  - What part of this suggestion might a husband or wife find easy?
  - What part might they find difficult?
  - What are some patterns or regular activity or traditions might help in encouraging or fostering good healthy and helpful conversations?
- At the start of 1 Cor 7, reference is made by Paul to something that the Corinthian church wrote to him about and he quotes them "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" (vs 1). There are various interpretations of this verse and the three most common are:
  - "It is good for a man not to have sexual intercourse with a woman" indicating that the church in Corinth is asking Paul whether celibacy is preferred.
  - "It is good for a man not to marry a woman" indicating that some at Corinth thought it best NOT to marry at all.
  - "It is good for a man not to touch a women in a manner that serves his needs only" thereby speaking against abusive behavior.
- Having considered the above three possibilities in the light of the written response that Paul gives in verses 2-6, write out a summary statement that describes both the general principle and specific activity that you understand from these verses. If you are in a group discussion share what seems appropriate but without obligation to do so, especially if in a mixed gathering. (Note however that Paul has no concerns about writing what he does to a

mixed gender congregation with the expectation that it will be read out and presumably discussed over lunch following the church service ☺)

- Verse 8-9 primarily deals with those who are 'unmarried' and whether it is appropriate for such persons to remarry. Interestingly, there are two words that could be used for 'unmarried'; the first is 'parthenos' which refers to both men and women who are NOT married and are virgins, and the second is 'agamos' and refers to those who are NOT now married but have had sexual relations (widows and widowers, divorced, as well as others specifically described in 1 Cor 6:9-20). The term 'agamos' is used 4 times in 1 Cor 7 and these are the only 4 times the term is used in the New Testament (vs 8, 11, 32, 34). Looking at the pattern of use, we note the following
  - Agamos covers those NOT married now but who have had sexual relations, including the wife mentioned in vs 10 and 11 and by extension, the husband mentioned in vs 11.
  - The unmarried man in vs 32 together with the unmarried woman and the virgin (woman) in vs 34 demonstrate that the use of the term 'unmarried' does not include people who have never had sexual relations (for they are called virgins).
  - Unmarried persons now, but who have had sexual relations in the past whether in or outside of marriage ought to consider remaining unmarried but are free to marry again.
  - For a little further reading on divorce and remarriage, see a summary chapter from a publication titled "Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible" by Biblical Scholar, David Instone-Brewer, which you will find in our Resources section and you may like to view <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRiCOLEoDaM> which is a Playmobil presentation on Divorce by David Instone-Brewer.
- Having considered the above comments on vs 8-9, have a go at writing a paragraph that would explain what you see as being an appropriate application of Paul's teaching for today with respect to
  - A woman who was married for a few years, however they drifted apart, separated and finally divorced and who now has found a man that she loves, and wants to enter into a life long marriage relationship with.
- Verses 10-11 exhorts both husbands and wives to remain faithful to the marriage relationship and he draws on the teaching of Jesus
  - "leaving" the marriage is serious and tragic and seen as a sin. Note: the command is broken in the 'leaving' – it is the breaking of the covenant relationship that is of primary concern.
  - however if they seek to leave the relationship they ought not do so in order to marry someone else.
  - Rather, they should seek to reconcile or remain single.
- Having considered the above comments on vs 10-11 as well as on vs 8-9, share your thoughts on the various responses that could be made to someone who has been divorced and now wishes to get married to someone else.
- Verses 12-16 deals with people who have come to faith in Jesus who are already married; what should they do about their marriage?
  - Consider the various scenarios that Paul addresses in these verses and discuss the contemporary implications.
    - What freedoms are being advocated?
    - What principles are identified?
    - What cautions are named?
- At the end of this section of writing by Paul on sexual relationship between a husband and wife, Paul introduces a discussion about "all things remaining equal, be content". By this Paul is meaning that when everything that he has

discussed and introduced is taken into consideration and as long as abuses are not being committed and ongoing sin is not offending others or God, the men and women involved ought to consider remaining as they are and not making changes simply because they have become followers of Jesus. Note however:

- Paul is addressing existing relationships primarily and what the gospel says about those relationships assuming godliness in behavior is fostered.
- Paul is NOT addressing the matter of life transformation and growing in godliness that would necessarily require the individual to 'change'
- The key verse in this is vs 24 – “each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them”.
- If ungodliness, or abuse or sinful behavior happens within the relationship then other principles come into play which are not discussed in this particular passage.
- Verses 25-27 deal with those who are single. Ray's sermon covered this area sensitively and if you have not listened to it please consider doing so. It is important to remember that Paul's contribution on singleness in the context of this letter is principally about the question the Corinthian church asked about sexual relationships; he is not primarily addressing the social and relational aspects of, what is in our context, an important consideration. Never the less, some considerations that are worthy of discussion and application within the community of faith are:
  - Singleness is a good gift from God enabling people to serve God.
  - Sometimes this 'good gift' does not seem 'good' at all.
  - The proliferation of material in the New Testament that speaks expectantly of positive, genuine loving acceptance of all people and the significance in the Christian community of mutuality and serving one another demands us as Christians to 'value other above ourselves' (Philippians 2:2)
- Considering the above comments on vs 25-27:
  - Reflect on the many positive contributions that people of a variety relational 'status' can bring into our individual and gathered lives.
  - In your circle of friends what richness do you experience because of the different people involved and what are you missing out on because of potential 'limited exposure'?
  - Think about the people in our church community and the Life Groups or Gospel Communities you are part of; list the ways the variety of people enhances your experience of life and of the beauty and wonder of God's people.
  - In what ways might you decide today to make a difference in the lives of others?