

Marital Faithfulness

1. Intro

- Nervous about today's sermon
- Firstly, over the last two weeks as we've talk about sex and relationships the faux pas and Freudian slips have been flowing thick and fast!
 - Two weeks ago, John said Paul wanted to caress the Corinthians not address them
 - Last week as Pam was reading the Bible she told us 'Each man should have his own husband'
 - So I'm a little worried what I might inadvertently slip out of my mouth today!
- Secondly, today's topic of sex and marriage may bring up some old wounds for people
 - God's word doesn't shy away from the rawness and realities of life
 - Its not a sugar-coated message of love and happiness
 - God addresses the realities and messiness of life
 - And even though it can be hard ... it's better that we hear a challenging word than be left to flail in the darkness on our own
 - If there are things I say today that do open up wounds, please come and talk to me afterwards, or talk to someone you trust who can listen and pray with you today

PRAY

- It's fair to say that since the sexual revolution of the 1960's ... our culture has become more and more sexualised
- Statistics are shocking ... but they paint a clear picture
 - Av age of children exposed to porn > 11.5 and decreasing
 - Av age of people having sex for the first time – 16yo
 - Av number of sexual partners – 18 (men), 8 (women)
 - 1 in 4 women experience domestic abuse in their lifetime
 - 4 out 5 couples live together before getting married
 - 1 in 3 marriages end in divorce > 48,000 per year
- All of those realities lead to painful, tragic and devastating consequences for those involved, others around them and our society more broadly

- When it comes to sex and marriage ... too often our culture is getting it badly wrong
- Which is why we need to hear what the apostle Paul has to say to us in 1 Cor 7

Context

- Last talk in series 1 Cor 1-7
- Corinth
 - Port city > cosmopolitan > wealthy
 - Pagan > temples Greek and Roman gods
 - Influence of Greek philosophy
 - Highly sexualised
- City very much like Sydney
- Problem is ... much of that culture was infiltrating the church
 - Paul planted it > 18 mths > preaching, evangelising, discipling > people converted
 - Paul moved on ... now 3-4 years later and Paul getting reports (written and verbal) that church is going pear-shaped
- Paul writing to address these issues and help them to see what are the 'Marks of a Healthy Church'

- One of big issues he deals with is sexual immorality in the church which he addresses in Ch 5 & 6
- Paul says no place for sexual immorality for those who follow Jesus
- Ch 7 turns his attention to talk about the right place for and thinking about sex
 - Long chapter on sex, marriage, singleness, and divorce
 - Last week > Steve addressed the theme of singleness
 - Key idea > 'marriage is good, but singleness is better'!
 - Very counter cultural
 - Didn't hear it ... download and listen > excellent > worth your while
- This week ... look at the theme of sex & marriage ...
 - And if the statistics show our culture is getting sex and marriage badly wrong ...
 - As we look again and 1 Cor 7 ... we'll see that
 - the wisdom of God that Paul gives us can help us get sex and marriage right ... and
 - what he has to say on sex and marriage is just as counter cultural as what he has to say on singleness

2. Marital Faithfulness in Sex (v1-6)

- See in v1 - *Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry*
 - Better translation – good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman
- Corinthians had written to Paul on various issues within the church
 - Paul is quoting / summarising what the Corinthians had been saying about sex ... that its good for a man not to have sex with a woman
- Not sure why they were saying this
 - Possibly the influence of some branches of Greek philosophy that adopted ascetism as a way of life
 - Or because some Corinthians prided themselves on being 'super spiritual' and wanted to avoid any form of sexual immorality ... so concluded its best not to have any sex at all
- And straight up ... Paul refutes that
 - He says No! Sex is good ... sex is great ... when it is experienced faithfully in marriage
 - See v2 – *But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.*
- Now this is not a command for single people to get married
 - No saying ... every man should go and get himself a wife and every woman should go and get herself a husband
 - That's clear because he says over and in this chapter that singleness is better than marriage
 - No ... need to understand that 'to have' = euphemism 'to have sex'
- So what Paul is saying is ...
 - Because sexual immorality is such an issue ... husbands and wives should have active sex lives
- Some people might be surprised to read this stuff in the Bible
 - Lots of ppl think
 - Christianity is down on sex
 - Christians are prudish
- No! The Bible tells us God
 - created sex
 - made us as sexual beings
 - sexual desires

- bodies are designed to have sex
- where sex is the ultimate expression of what Genesis 1 talks about when a man and woman coming together and become one flesh

- However ... notice though there are boundaries to sex
 - We are not free to have sex whenever and however and with whoever we want
 - Paul says sex is to be between husband and wife
 - **All** other expressions of sex outside that boundary is the sexual immorality that Paul is referring

- **Illustration - Sand Pit**
- Like if you or I build sand pit for a toddler ... say
 - play in the sand pit
 - have as much fun as you want
 - do whatever you want ... as long as you stay inside the sandpit > bindies
 - Don't go outside the sand pit because you will get hurt
 - We know best, we love you, we want what's best for you

- God does the same with sex
- He says ...
 - Here are the boundaries
 - Within the good design of marriage I have created ... have sex and enjoy it
 - But not outside that boundary ... because when you do ... you and / or others will get hurt
- We see so many have experienced the pain caused by sex outside marriage
 - Emotional trauma guys using girls for sex and dumping them
 - Sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancies, porn, adultery, STI's ...

- So not only does sex in marriage guard you against sexual immorality ... but as those who did the marriage enrichment course recently were reminded ... sex is like the glue in a relationship
 - It helps a couple stick together
 - When a couple has sex the brain releases a chemical called oxytocin that is often called the 'cuddle or love hormone'
 - It helps create an emotional attachment between a couple
 - Like two strips of velcro coming together and locking onto the other and developing a tight bond

- Which is why sex outside of the permanence and stability of marriage causes so much pain and hurt
 - Because when the relationship ends (after one night or one year) there is an emotion tearing and damage that takes place as the bond is broken and pulled apart

- When it comes to sex in marriage Paul also says there ought to be a mutual other-person centeredness to the sex between a married couple
 - v3-4 ³*The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.* ⁴ *The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.*

- Both the wife AND the husband are to consider the sexual needs of the other
 - Even more radical ... their bodies belong to each other!
 - In that culture it was a very radical idea for men to give themselves sacrificially to their wives
 - Greek / Roman culture very patriarchal
 - Normal for the woman to give herself to the man ... not the other way around
 - But God's good design for sex honours both the husband AND the wife
 - Sex in marriage is meant to be selfless, giving, and other person centered

Application

- That was counter cultural then ... and its counter cultural today
- Our world very individualistic
- Sex and marriage is often seen through the lens of individualism ... what's good for ME
- Many people think ...
 - When I get married
 - I will be fulfilled
 - I won't be lonely
 - I will find satisfaction and pleasure
 - Sex in marriage is thought of as all about fulfilling my sexual urges and needs and desires > not about the other
- Paul says ...
 - No! Your body is not your own alone ... it belongs to your spouse also

- You are to give yourselves to each other ... to serve and satisfy your spouse ... not yourself
- That's radical stuff!

Warning

- Some of you may hear this and be filled with fear and anxiety
 - Because all you hear is ... "he has the freedom to do whatever he wants"
 - Or you're wondering how your husband might treat you
- Let me say in clearest possible terms
 - This is not a mandate for a husband to abuse his wife
 - There is absolutely no scope for a man to force his wife to do things that she doesn't want to do
 - Men ... your body does not belong to you alone ... it belongs also to your wife ... therefore she is free to say "No" to you about how you use your body
- If we understand what Paul is saying here ... sexual intimacy will be mutually joyful and pleasurable when husband and wife are seeking to engage sexually in a way that seeks first and foremost to please the desires of their spouse
 - And that is mutual ... not a one-way street
- I understand there may be some of you for whom domestic abuse is a reality
 - Physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual, financial
 - If that's you ... we weep and mourn with you
 - There is no excuse for it
 - The Bible makes it clear it is wrong ... there is no place for it in marriage
- Two things ... firstly, be assured ...
 - This passage is not talking to you
 - Talking to couple who are in a healthy marriage relationship
 - Imperfect as all marriages are ... but not one where abuse is at play
- Secondly ...
 - If you are or have experienced domestic abuse and haven't yet seen anyone or got help
 - Please speak to me, Liana, Katie, Joce, someone you trust
 - We will listen, we will believe you
 - We're not experts, but will help you get the help and support you need and want

- Now on a different, but very related topic ... what Paul is saying in these first six verses is hugely relevant to our porn saturated culture
- Brothers and sisters ... the answer to our sexual desires and urges is not pornography
 - Porn is destructive and it ruins marriages
 - Porn completely undermines what real sex is meant to achieve within a marriage
- Why?
 - You are giving yourself to what you see on the screen, instead of your spouse
 - You are depriving your spouse of the sexual intimacy that is reserved for them alone
 - You are forgetting body is not yours alone but also belongs to your wife ... therefore not free to satisfy yourself with pornography
 - Jesus says in Matt 5:28 – you are committing adultery in your heart ... as you fantasise about and give yourself to another
- Not only does porn undermine the God's good design for sex in marriage ... it causes lots of other issues ...
 - Porn creates neuro-pathways that says this how I satisfy my sexual desires
 - Diminishes libido and desire for sex with spouse
 - Leads to dissatisfaction with sex with your spouse, because it's not what you used to
 - High chance of adultery
- When spouse finds out ... and they will eventually
 - Destroys trust
 - Tears apart the velcro of your relationship
- And if you're single and using porn don't think it doesn't matter
 - Because what you are doing is forming habits and re-wiring your brain that is going to mess with ruin your marriage and sex life if and when you do get married
- Because of all that ...
 - We need to do what Paul says in 6:18 ... flee it!
 - Whatever is driving you to porn ... you need to address it, repent of it
 - Get help, share your struggle with a faithful / trustworthy brother or sister
 - Give yourself to our spouse instead
- God calls us to marital faithfulness in sex

3. Marital Faithfulness in Commitment (v10-16)

- The second thing Paul addresses in this chapter on marriage is marital faithfulness in commitment
- In other words, ... he says stay married and don't divorce
 - v10-11 ⁰ *To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹ But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.*
- When Paul says I give this command ... not I, but the Lord he is picking up what Jesus taught in the gospels about the permanence of marriage
 - That is ... it's a life-long commitment
 - For instance Jesus says in Mark 10:6-9
 - ⁶ *"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'*
 - ⁷ *'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.'* So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹ *Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."*
- Now why is Paul making this point?
- It seems some of the anti-sex brigade in Corinth were thinking that the best way to stay celibate was by divorcing their partners altogether
- Paul says ...
 - No! ... Stay married
 - And if you have separated ... either remain single or be reconciled to your spouse
- Others in Corinth had obviously become Christians after they were married and were concerned that in some way
 - their marriage might be defiled; or
 - by have sex with their unbelieving spouse ... that was sexual immorality
 - And they were thinking ... they should separate or divorce
- Paul addresses this in v12-13
 - *If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.*

- Paul is saying ... your marriage doesn't become defiled because you're a believer and he's not
 - Your marriage is still valid and good ... so stay married

- And in v14 he explains why
 - *14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

- Rather than thinking that your unbelieving spouse somehow defiles you and your marriage ... actually the opposite is true
 - They are sanctified because of you
- What's that mean?
 - It doesn't mean they are saved ... because Paul goes on to say in v16 that God might work through the marriage and the spouse to bring the unbeliever to faith and salvation

- The unbeliever is sanctified or holy by virtue of them being part of the community of faith
 - They are not unholy in the sense they are excluded from God's people
 - Therefore, they're able to share in the blessing and witness of hearing the gospel, rubbing shoulders with God's people, seeing and experiencing the joys, blessings and privileges of being part of the community of faith ... in a way they wouldn't have if they were excluded because the marriage was considered defiled or invalid
- As one commentator says
 - "The example, witness, prayer and living out of the gospel by the believing spouse is bound affect to ethos, values and beliefs of the unbelieving husband or wife"

- **Illustration – Col & Janelle**
 - Great example of this is Col and Janelle
 - Janelle and Col married for 27 years
 - Janelle is a Christian ... Col was a tolerant sceptic
 - But 6 years ago ... God worked in and through Janelle ... her connection to C@P, her witness to Col over the years, her invitation to Col to come to Christmas Carols service
 - God by his Spirit used that, softened Col's heart after 21 years to investigate Christianity ... eventually God saved him
- Col was sanctified because of Jell

- This is not saying that the Christian can go out and marry any one they want ... it doesn't matter if they're not a Christian because they will be sanctified and might be saved
 - v39 makes it clear ... if a Christian person is to marry ... they must 'belong to the Lord'

- And so Paul reiterates ... whether mixed marriage or Christian marriage ... don't divorce

- **Application**
- We live in a culture today of divorce that's ready and easy ... for any and every reason
- And it's a great and painful tragedy when that happens
- Christians aren't immune from it
- Christians are sinful and have baggage and bad habits and make poor choices and decisions that undermine and sometimes lead to the breakdown of marriage
- But rather than look for the exception and the easy way out that our world says is right ... we ought to look at the marriage that all earthly marriages point to ... which is the marriage between God and his people
- Throughout the Bible God is likened to the husband and his people are the bride
 - And as his bride we have sinned against him
 - And yet he remains steadfast and faithful to us ... despite our failings, despite our sin, despite our unfaithfulness

- And even though God had every reason to divorce us ... he didn't
- And because our earthly marriages are a pattern of the heavenly marriage
 - They are to be marked by life-long commitment
 - *Until death do we part*
 - *In sickness and in health, richer or poorer*
 - *For better ... or for worse*
- Therefore, remain committed to your spouse and your marriage
 - My only caveat here is ... if you are experiencing abuse or don't feel safe in your marriage ... you probably need to separate
 - Please don't think that God's view on marriage and divorce means you have to don't have to stay in an abusive relationship ... you don't and you shouldn't

- I know many of you have gone through difficult times in your marriage
 - Some have been and continue to remain painful
 - I want to commend you for not taking the easy option ... for not following the world's thinking around easy divorce
 - And I want to encourage all of you to keep working hard on your marriages ... whether struggling or healthy
- But friends we also need to remember ... that no spouse is perfect
 - No marriage partner is ever going to fully satisfy you ... fulfill you ... or make you completely happy
 - If you go into a marriage thinking that ...
 - You will only be disappointed ... and
 - You will crush your spouse under a weight of unreasonable expectation
- Therefore, we need to recognise that the ultimate love and fulfilment can only come from the ultimate marriage ... between us and Jesus
 - For he is the one who loves each of us perfectly, unconditionally, sacrificially ... whether we are married, single, divorced or widowed
- And that our hurts and bruises in our marriages are a reminder that this world is not our home ... and there is a home to come where everything will be fulfilled in the way you hope and desire and dream of

4. Marital Faithfulness to God (v25-40)

- There is one final thing we need to see that Paul is addressing in this chapter about marital faithfulness ... and its our marital faithfulness in our priorities
- Last week we saw that Paul urge the Corinthians if they were willing remain sexually chaste ... to remain single
- And the reason why in v32 & 34 ... is so they can be undivided in their devotion to the Lord and the Lord's affairs
- Why's that important?
 - v26 - Because of the present crisis
 - We don't know what the crisis was that Paul is referring to
 - Might have been a famine, maybe persecution, or earthquake
 - But what Paul sees in the crisis is that it's a sign of times we are living in between the Jesus first and second coming > resurrection and return

- And that every day it is one day closer
- And he unpacks that in v29-31
 - *What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them.*
- Paul is not saying don't care for your wife, or mourn with a grieving friend or enjoy good things of this world
- He just means ...
 - hold loosely to them
 - don't make them the ultimate things
- Why?
 - *For this world in its present form is passing away.*
- What he's urging here is that we have the right perspective about life in this world
- Because when we have the wrong perspective ... we only see the here and now
- We forget the reality that life is eternal and so we just end up living in and for present and forget that we are but a blip in the timeline of eternity
- When that's our perspective ... we end up with a life of trivia ... chasing after
 - Homes
 - Careers
 - Degrees
 - Successes
 - Experiences
- And forget there is a God over us and a life to come
- If we forget this reality and think this life is all there is ... all we will care about is
 - what you eat
 - what you drink
 - holidays
 - material possessions
 - personal happiness ...
- Maximising all of that until we die
- If that's how you think ... your priorities will be all wrong

- Key Paul says is to see things from an eternal perspective
 - World in its present form is passing away!
 - Judgment day is coming!
 - Time is short!

- Brothers and sisters, if we've only got one life ... and that's it ... and when you die it's over ... then sure ... chase after trivia
- But if eternal life is true ... and the resurrection of Jesus proves it is ... then this life is only momentary ... then our priorities will be radically different

- **Illustration – me rugby**
- Most of you know I played rugby when I was younger
 - I wanted to play for NSW and Australia
 - Lots of the guys I played with went on to do that
 - Now in God's providence I got repeated stress fractures in my feet and it didn't happen
 - But what if I had made it?
 - What would it have been for?
 - A few blue or gold footy jerseys
 - My name in a Wikipedia page of former players
 - A few accolades from people
 - Trivia!

- When we look at life with the perspective of eternity knowing time is short until Jesus returns and judges the living and the dead ... it doesn't matter!
- Because when you have the right perspective ... then it radically reshapes your priorities about what you care about and think is important
 - Which must be living out our mission to be and make disciples of Jesus Christ
 - Surely ... that's what truly matters
 - That's the right priority
- Because you understand
 - there is only one life and it will soon come to pass
 - that time is short ... and only what is done for Christ will last!

- That's why Paul can say singleness is better than marriage
- But the same is true if you are married ...
 - The need and the urgency doesn't change once you put on a wedding ring

- The fact that the time is short, and the present world is passing away is still as true for you if you have a spouse
- The only thing that is different for you if you are married is that you're now serving and devoted to the Lord **together**

- So when it comes to faithfulness in marriage ... as a married couple you are called to be faithful to God in your priorities
 - Living to be and make disciples of Jesus is the mission of your marriage

- So, brothers and sisters ... how are you going spending your life being devoted to the Lord?
- How are you in your marriage maximizing opportunities to serve the Lord Jesus?
- Yes, you need to love your wife ... and love your husband ... and raise your kids ... and be faithful in marriage
- But in your marriage seek beyond that ... and be faithful to the priorities that come from having an eternal perspective that reminds us that
 - the time is short!
 - this world is passing away!
 - Jesus is returning and judgment day is coming

- So brothers and sisters ... don't live your life as though the other stuff is all that matters
- Think about eternity ... and the few short years you have to use your time being devoted to the Lord as we live to be and make disciples of Jesus
- Because that's what matters ... that's what will last

PRAY