

WHITE MEMORIAL — PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH —

WMPC - Men's Bible Study

First Corinthians - Winter-Spring 2017

Lesson 4

Read First Corinthians 5, 6, and 7 (There is a lot covered in chapters 5-7. To aid you in following Paul's argument and recognizing the broader structure, see the detailed outline for this week's reading following the "Links for Further Study" section.)

Three Sets of Questions:

Q1: Paul's response to the community's 'sex scandal' (5.1f.) says a lot about what most concerns Paul in 1 Corinthians. [a.] What are the details of this scandal (i.e., what's actually happening), and why is it so heinous? [b.] How does the Corinthian church itself respond to this scandal, and why is its behavior even more concerning to Paul than the scandal itself? [c.] Why does he instruct them to take such seemingly harsh measures of discipline against this particular man? Another way to put that last question: What is the harm done to a church body when she permits / tolerates / turns a blind eye to *overt, obvious* patterns of sin amongst her members?

Q2: When discussing Christian faith, we often resort to the phrase "spiritual life." But if Paul were alive today, he might have some scruples with this phrase. How does Paul try to persuade his audience that our relation to God through Jesus Christ is not simply spiritual but *physical*, specifically in chapter 6? What do you think are some pitfalls for apprehending faith as "spiritual" rather than "physical," or "embodied?" Is the phrase "spiritual but not religious" somehow tied to this severing of the spiritual and the physical?

Q3: Chapter 7 is *not* Paul's treatise on marriage; it is his response to particular issues and questions that the Corinthians' have written to him about (7:1). Moreover, a close reading of the chapter demonstrates that Paul's ideas about sex—and his ideas about women—have been widely misunderstood (e.g., *Paul thinks sex is defiling, or Paul is a misogynist*). [a.] What theological belief seems to be shaping Paul's view of sex and marriage? [b.] Where does he leave room for the individual conscience in matters related to marriage and singleness (make a list)? [c.] Based on your reading of this section, what do you think Paul wants for every Corinthian Christian, whether married or unmarried?

Three Insights:

I1: My guess is that you've never heard 1 Corinthians 5 cited as someone's favorite chapter in the Bible. Paul here insists that the Corinthians—and that *we*—face up to our sins, whatever they may be. But lest we misunderstand Paul's demand that such a member be expelled from the community, we should take into consideration the witness of other New Testament texts, especially from Paul. Other texts that center on community discipline see forgiveness and reconciliation as the aim of the disciplinary measure (e.g., 2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:11; Gal 6:1). Richard Hays rightly reminds us, though, that "forgiveness *does not take the place of discipline*; rather it *follows* clear community discipline and authentic repentance."¹

¹Richard Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), p. 86.

I2: “All things are lawful for me” (6:12) is the slogan for the Christian libertines in the Corinthian community. Paul quotes this phrase from their letter in order to counter the logic they’re using. There’s a bit of guesswork involved, but 6:12 might read like the following if it were in the form of a dialogue:

Corinthians: “All things are lawful for me.”

Paul: But not all things are beneficial.

Corinthians: “All things are lawful for me!”

Paul: But I will not be dominated / mastered by anything.

The late Allen Verhey, a Christian ethicist who worked at Duke, offers the following reflection on true Christian freedom, which stands against the libertine assertions of some in the Corinthian church:

Christian freedom is not found in the libertine assertion that we are our own, that what we do in our own bodies is a matter of moral indifference and no one else’s business. That way leads to alienation from our bodies, alienation from each other, and alienation from God; that way leads to death. “You are not your own,” Paul reminds them; “you were bought with a price” (6:19, 20). Christian freedom is our redemption from our enslavement to sin, not a new excuse for it.²

I3: Chapter 7 begins with the phrase *now concerning*.... Keep your eyes open for this phrase as you continue reading onward after chapter 7; it appears here in 7:1 and in 7:25, as well as 8:1, 12:1, 16:1, and 16:12. Conventional biblical interpretation supposes that each time Paul employs this phrase in the letter, he is introducing a topic about which the Corinthians have asked him a question in previous correspondences. Richard Hays cautions us against this supposition, however because *now concerning* is a common phrase used by other writers of that time to simply introduce a new topic. But here in chapter 7, as well as in chapters 8-10, he says we can be sure that *now concerning* is being used to introduce a topic of theirs to which Paul responds.

Links for Further Study:

L1: A bit of help understanding recent cultural phenomenon like “the hook up culture” through a theological lens. **Justin Toh, “Great Sexpectations: Augustine, Ashley Madison and the Problem of Disordered Love.”**

L2: If Question 2 piqued your curiosity, here’s a deeper dive into the “spirituality” craze from the magnificent preacher and writer Fleming Rutledge. **“What’s Wrong With ‘Spirituality’”**

L3: Here’s a prayer on marriage and commitment that Stanley Hauerwas, professor of theological ethics at Duke Divinity, likes to pray before lecturing on marriage in his Christian ethics course:

The Audacity of Commitment

Unrelenting God, your faithfulness is fearful to us. We desire a love more occasional, more spontaneous, less serious. Even worse, you call us to be unrelenting lovers—capable of making lifelong promises like “until death do us part.” Such a vow is surely a miracle, since only you can give us the boldness to so pledge ourselves. We thank you for such audacity and pray that we may be faithful to one another as you have been to us. Amen.³

² Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 225.

³ Hauerwas, *Prayers Spoken Plainly* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 77.

Outline of 1 Cor. 5-7⁴

A CALL FOR COMMUNITY DISCIPLINE (5:1-6:20)

- I. “Drive Out The Wicked Man From Among You” (5:1-13)
 - A. Paul’s Conclusion—He Must Leave (5:1-5)
 - B. Argument By Analogy: The Passover (5:6-8)
 - C. Correcting A Misunderstanding (5:9-13)
- II. Legal Disputes Should Be Handled Within The Community (6:1-11)
- III. Glorify God In Your Body (6:12-20)
 - A. Theological Premise 1: Resurrection of The Body (6:13-14)
 - B. Theological Premise 2: Our Bodies Are Not *Ours* (6:15-17, 20)
 - C. Theological Premise 3: Temple of The Holy Spirit (6:18-19)

SEX AND MARRIAGE AT THE TURN OF THE AGES (7:1-40)

- I. Counsel for Corinthians in Various Marital Statuses (7:1-16)
 - A. For the Married: Maintain Sexual Relations (7:1-7)
 - B. For Widowers and Widows: Stay Unmarried (7:8-9)
 - C. For Christians Married Couples: No Divorce (7:10-11)
 - D. For Christians Married to Unbelievers: Stay In The Marriage (7:12-16)
- II. General Principle: Remain As You Were When Called (7:17-24)
 - A. Argument by Analogy: Circumcision / Uncircumcision (7:18-19)
 - B. Argument by Analogy: Slavery / Freedom (7:21-23)
- III. Counsel for Engaged Couples: Remain As You Are (7:25-38)
 - A. Why? The “Present Necessity” (7:25-28)
 - B. Reasons For This Advice
 - 1. Present Age is Passing Away (7:29-31)
 - 2. Free To Serve God Without ‘Distractions’ (7:32-35)
- IV. Reprise: Counsel for Wives & Widows (7:39-40)

⁴ Except for a few editorial changes, this suggested outline is based on that of Hays, *Ibid.*.