

1 Corinthians 7:10-35 We face painful relationships Fintry, 26/5/2013, pm

- Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-17, 29-35

Introduction

- Challenge to relate to each other in emotionally and spiritually mature ways, especially in times of crisis:
 - eg fracturing of church in midst of same-sex ministry stuff that is going on just now...
- How do we set about relating to others who have, perhaps, taken a different decision about what to do in response to last Monday's debate and decisions...?
 - want to tackle that from Scripture by exploring as a worked example what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about marriage...
- I grew up sheltered from the kinds of issue Paul was addressing:
 - I still remember the first time I felt the force of the pain and distress it can cause
 - I was involved in leading the Christian Union while I was at Edinburgh Uni - I was maybe 20 or possibly 21
 - I used to pray regularly with girl who was vice-president of the CU
 - over the course of the year that we prayed together, as well as praying for the work of the CU, we'd from time to time pray for each other, families, and the like
 - and a repeated theme for this girl was the pain it caused her that her parents, and her father in particular, were not Christians
 - these were people she loved dearly, admired, respected, genuinely looked up to
 - and yet who did not share that faith which was the heartbeat of her life, who were destined to spend eternity separated from God... and from their daughter
 - though I'd known the fact of such situations, somehow the pain they can cause had - until this point - passed me by...
- Perhaps in different ways we still step round such issues:
 - how are we to live when those we love, particularly family, though also close friends, do not know the Lord?
 - for instance, there is a tendency to talk about ideals, and not reality - to talk as if home is the place where we can open and relaxed about our faith, since there it is shared!
 - but for many of us the reality is more ambiguous
- Husbands, wives, children, parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, close friends...
 - maybe they do not share the faith
 - or, and sometimes this can be even harder, they used to share the faith but have grown cold over the years... (for some in my own family, at funeral during this week...)
 - and we feel sometimes torn, sometimes under pressure, sometimes as if no one understands
- It may "present"/show-up in different ways for different people:
 - not coming to church
 - resistance to you coming to church
 - differing values in bringing up the children
 - different priorities in spending money - from giving to the church, through to the kinds of choices we each make each week in Tesco!

Exegesis

- There is actually plenty that the Scripture says...
 - I've chosen to look at one particular passage, which focuses on married couples
 - but I hope we'll not only see the particular teaching in that context, but also the wider implications of some of the assumptions from which Paul was clearly operating as he taught the Corinthians

To Christian Couples

- (10) To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not

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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.*
- Emphasise these two verses critically directed to Christian couples
 - implication is that there is a distinction to be drawn!
 - where a couple is married, share the same Lord, have covenanted together in marriage vows, they should not divorce
 - caveat of Jesus' permission of divorce in the case of marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 5:32)
- Other implication here, of v.11, is that it does sometimes go wrong!
 - Paul isn't an idiot - he lives in the real world - and as well as the ideal, here there is advice for how to go on...

To Mixed Marriages of the Willing

- (12) *To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): 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.*
- (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.*
- Here is practical advice for those who are married to a non-Christian:
 - and the advice is essentially - do your best to make a go of it!
 - it doesn't particularly matter how the situation came about - whether you became a Christian after you were married, or your husband or wife drifted away from faith, or whether you married a non-Christian despite the Scriptural advice not to...
 - now that this is your situation, make the best of it
- Note implication that there is a tension:
 - one person in the relationship loves the Lord... and also the partner
 - the other person in the relationship loves their partner... but not the Lord
 - to misquote an infamous saying, marriages are tricky when there are three people in them
 - this is the painful reality
- Finally, though, look at v.14:
 - there is some kind of tangible benefit for the partner who is not a Christian
 - the scholars have debated and debated this one!!
 - in light of v.16, it seems that Paul does not mean that they are saved... but something of how God views the household does seem to change

To Mixed Marriages of the Un willing

- (15) *But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.*
- (16) *How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*
- Sometimes the non-Christian partner is not willing to live with the Lord in the relationship:
 - for the Christian, though not the desirable outcome, this should be acceptable grounds for separation - God does not want us to live in a state of conflict, but of peace!
 - oh, the pain that is hidden behind these words of broken relationship - but what is clear is that when this situation has been part of the break-up, we do not need to add to the things we need to work through any false guilt that we have been less than Christian since the marriage has failed
- *"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Mark 13:12-13)*

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Leading the Life God Assigns

- (17) *Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.*
- Starting point for Paul is that we should live well, live faithfully, live for Christ, **in the situation where he has placed us**
 - he may move us on - whether by a calling to new job or vocation - or through the life changes of death or divorce or whatever...
 - but we are to live for him **now**, in the place where we are, not always looking back to what was or forward to what might be
- Verses v.29-36 point up the same priority in all this:
 - whatever the circumstances, to live first for God
 - with him as our compass, our fixed point...
 - there, the situation was some kind of current crisis in the Corinthian Church (**probably not the second coming, as we might think at first glance**)
 - but the priority - particularly acutely applied in the midst of crisis - was to be **concerned with the Lord's affairs... undivided devotion to the Lord" (v.35)**

Conclusion

- The Lord is more devoted to us, more concerned for us than we can possibly imagine:
 - we seek to live for him in the shelter of his provision for us
- Turning back to our wider situation, and our relating to one another:
 - there is no single answer for everyone - Paul's dealing with marriage relationships was nuanced, engaging with the particular situations...
 - issues need to be faced, addressed, and not simply swept under the carpet - of wounds, need to be cleaned out (lest they get infected), though not endlessly fiddled with (lest they get infected!)
 - so we will talk about, reflect with others, allow ourselves to be vulnerable and address, how we might respond
 - I sat over coffee with the person who "seconded" the motion 2d that eventually won the day, chatting to a fellow evangelical - they profoundly disagree over whether proposing such a motion was the right thing to do, but they respect and value each other's contribution, motivation, and were committing themselves to having coffee together soon, to not putting the other down, to modelling an emotionally mature relationship...
 - maybe folk we know will take some kind of collective action, perhaps even forming a new congregation - or maybe folk we know will commit themselves even more to the existing denomination, fighting to see it revived - and we'll feel the pressure to either envy or look down on their course of action.
- **Live faithfully for Christ in the situation where we have been placed, considering carefully, prayerfully any action we might take, and its impact on those we are in relationship with**