



FAITH
COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH

Gospel Atmosphere

I CORINTHIANS



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So we are in 1 Corinthians 7 and thus far in the book Paul is giving corrective instruction to a church that is being destroyed by pride, a misunderstanding of Christian liberty, and a distorted view of sexuality.

And the big point that Paul has been making over and over is that in order to experience Christian fulfillment we need to submit our desires. And in that submission of desires our souls are shaped to receive his gifts.

Two weeks ago we talked about what to do with the desire to get married. Paul says, don't just unthinkingly act on that desire. Perhaps, for the sake of kingdom effectiveness, it might be better to not marry. Paul says, it is actually better to not marry, if you are able to accept the lifestyle, because you can have a more singular focus in ministry.

So Paul says, we need to submit our desire to be married. Why? Because it may be the case that your best platform for the gospel will be in your singleness.

Now Paul is going to flip that around. Sure, there are those who are not married and have the desire to be married. But then there are some who are married and desire to not be married.

- Perhaps they are married to a very difficult person, perhaps they are married to someone who is blind to their insensitivities, who is unreasonable, who is frustratingly unresponsive.
- They are married to an unbeliever with totally different values.
- Maybe they are married to someone who just doesn't understand them and they feel lonely and misunderstood.
- Maybe they are married to someone who doesn't care about their emotional needs.
- Maybe they aren't being loved.
- Maybe they aren't being respected.

And all this creates real difficult problems and every desire of their heart is to NOT be married.

And in the exact same way, Paul says, you too need to submit those desires. Just like the single person has a unique platform for the sake of the gospel, so the married person in a difficult marriage has a different platform for the sake of the gospel.

And the basic message of Paul today is that the solution to the problems in your marriage is never divorce. But his reason for saying that is different than you would expect.

- In God's mind the danger of divorce isn't that you won't be happy. That's generally true, that divorce makes you less happy but not always. You could point to many people who are "more fulfilled" married to a new spouse. But our marital fulfillment isn't the chief concern.
- In God's mind the danger of divorce isn't that you will break his law and for some reason it's all about keeping the laws. It's true, when we divorce, we break his law but why is the law there? What's the law trying to protect?

The danger of divorce is that you destroy your platform for testifying about who Jesus is. What do we mean by that? What is a platform. A platform is designed for proclamation. It props you up high so everyone can see you. It's positioned in such a way that all eyes are on you. And it makes you feel a little uncomfortable. It's hard to stand on the platform. There's all this pressure when you stand on a platform. And our natural instinct is to want to get rid of that uncomfortable pressure. But the only way to get rid of the pressure is to get rid of the platform. And when you get rid of the platform you also remove the possibility of any real message coming across.

God has placed each of us on a unique platform. We all have different angles from which we can testify to Jesus all satisfying person. And collectively they are very powerful. Paul is going to say

at the end of this section in Corinthians 7:17, "Let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him." Do you hear in this that you have been given an assignment from God. You have a mission. It's to honor God in the marital state he has placed you. You are to speak the gospel from the specific platform he has given you.

- If you are single or widowed, then say what only single or widowed people can say about the person of Jesus Christ.
- If you are in a beautiful marriage then say what only married people can say about the wonderful nature of Jesus Christ.
- If you are in a hard marriage then say what only people in a hard marriage can say about the person of Jesus Christ.
- If you are divorced, then say what only divorced people can say about the all-satisfying person of Jesus Christ.

If we kick and complain and moan against "the life the Lord has assigned to us" then we destroy the platform and hence the opportunity to proclaim Christ.

Last week we talked about the platform of singleness. This week we talk about the platform of marriage and divorce. We are going to see the advantages of these unique platforms for the proclamation of the all-satisfying person of Jesus Christ. So we'll see four different platforms from the text today, two that have to do with marriage and two that have to do with divorce.

So let's read:

1 Corinthians 7:10-17, To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.

For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

MARITAL PLATFORMS FOR THE GOSPEL

1. The Platform of Loving Unity.

So the first platform we are going to discuss is kind of baked into the fabric of the text even though it is not explicitly talked about - platform of loving unity. As we read the text we see Paul addressing all sorts of problems that could exist, various ways that marriage could be broken and unhealthy. But the very fact that you can identify something as broken and unhealthy means it's opposite must exist. Broken implies there is an unbroken version. Unhealthy means there must be a healthy version you are comparing it against.

Paul deals with the issue of divorce here which lets you know something has gone terribly wrong. There is a thing of beauty which is being destroyed, that's going against it's design. So let's start with the ideal platform, the prototype, the way it is supposed to be.

Marriage is this unique platform that is supposed to be a tremendous stage from which you proclaim the person of Jesus Christ. And the reason it is such a powerful platform is because of what marriage is. The essence of marriage demonstrates something very profound about Jesus Christ.

What do we mean when we say the essence of marriage? What is the essence of something? If I say, "What is the essence of a Christian." It's someone who goes to church. No it's deeper than that because there are people who go to church and aren't Christians. It has to be more distinct. The essence of something is that essential quality that because it has this unique signature, makes it what it is. Only the thing itself has this thing and that's what makes this thing the thing.

So what's the essence of marriage? What is the distinct component that makes it what it is?

Is it affection? Well it can't be that. People have affection for hamsters and cats. So affection can't be the essence of marriage because you aren't married to your pets. Is it procreation? Of course not. Rabbits procreate and aren't married. People can have children and not be married.

Here's the essence. Clear back in the garden when God established marriage he said, "... a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife," There it is. The word, cleave, is the essence of marriage. That word, cleave, literally means to make a covenant. It means to make a public vow of absolute faithfulness and commitment, and you're not married until that's happened. When it has happened you are married. It's a covenant of future love. That's the essence of it because you don't do that with anyone else. You can't reduce marriage any more fundamentally than that. You only do that with one person.

Just for the record here, the traditional wedding vows are really wise in this way. The whole focus of traditional marriage vows is about

making a covenant. I've heard some people write their own vows but almost always demonstrates that they think marriage is something different than what it actually is. It almost always omits the essence of what marriage actually is. Usually the vows come back saying something like, "I love you, and you are so beautiful and I care for you," and that sort of thing. Do you realize that the traditional marriage vows and the essence of any vow says absolutely nothing about about the present. It's all couched in

- the future,
- the unknowable future,
- the uncertain future,
- the future that most certainly contains things that will cause you to feel differently than you do.

from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.

A person receiving the vow only cares about the future. Imagine if you made a vow to pay off a loan based on present feelings alone. I love this car. Look how shiny and new it is. It is so beautiful. I totally want to take care of it. The car dealer doesn't care how you feel now. The car dealer cares that you promise to continue to pay when? In 5 years when it's dinged, scratched with coffee stains and crumbled cookies stuck between the seats.

Do you see what marriage is? I'm cleaving to you no matter what, no matter what..... To say, "I love you," is not a covenant. To say, "I love you" in front of the world isn't a covenant. In a wedding, you are promising future love.

Now if that is what marriage is, if that is its essence, do you see how beautiful and wonderful a platform that can be to testify to Christ?

Because that is exactly what Christ does to us. He promises to love us, not when we are shined up and look pretty, not when we are spotless, but no matter what. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. If both people are loving one another unconditionally, in covenant, you are demonstrating the relationship between Christ and the church as Ephesians 5 says. You are showing just how beautiful Jesus Christ really is. Your marriage is a billboard to Jesus. You give people a taste of unconditional love and you say, "You think that's beautiful? This is the ultra-flawed version. You should see the real thing! You should see the author of unconditional love!" So that's the platform of loving unity.

Any Marital Situation Can Be a Platform

Now the majority of what Paul talks about in this passage is not this. You can see here that Paul is actually addressing this desire for people to get divorces. Things are getting difficult and they feel the need to separate. People aren't loving the way they should and it's creating serious problems and friction. And Paul is adamant that even in those situations, especially in those situations, you have an equally powerful, arguably even more powerful platform for gospel proclamation.

I want to illustrate this point because it's rather important. You might feel that the only way you can really honor Christ is through a perfect marriage. And for you that can't happen. It's already been ruined. You've been divorced. Or maybe there is marital unfaithfulness. And now it's over. That's not true. Wherever God has placed you, you can be a witness for Christ. And it's even true to say that wherever your sin has taken you, that represents a unique platform for proclaiming the all-satisfying person of Jesus Christ.

Let's say for example that you were a marketer and you wanted to show people how much cheetos are worthy of your affection. There are lots of ways you could do that.

- The most obvious way would be to show someone smiling while eating them. But there are other ways, perhaps even more compelling.
- You could show someone sacrificing giant wads of cash to get them dropped shipped to them at Everest Base camp.
- You show someone who was prone to binging throwing them out promising to never eat them again, and then being drawn irresistibly back to them.
- You could show a competitor trying to destroy the cheeto plant because they know they have no chance competing with such a superior product.

You see each of these platforms creates a unique way to exhibit just how awesome cheetos are. Now I know that's kind of silly but in a very similar way, God has given each of us a unique platform to testify to how awesome Jesus is in the marriage situation we find ourselves. You have a platform. Don't waste it. What can you say in your marriage situation that nobody else can say about how amazing Jesus Christ is. How can you demonstrate the love of God. Maybe your marriage is great and you are a living demonstration of Ephesians 5. Awesome! Maybe your job is to love an unfaithful spouse like God does in Ezekiel 16 or like the prophet Hosea who was called to marry a Harlot. Do you see how this is a different manifestation of the same love? Both testify in unique ways

Now in verse 10-11 Paul acknowledges that not all marriages can stay together. There will be cases in which separation happens. The word separation here does not have in mind our modern legal definition. Separation here meant divorce but the reason it's

translated this way is because of God's desire for their to always be intention to reconcile. There is an ongoing sadness that sin has broken things but an equal desire for reconciliation. So this becomes the second platform. We will call it the platform of reluctant separation.

MARITAL PLATFORMS FOR THE GOSPEL

1. The Platform of Loving Unity.
2. The Platform of Reluctant Separation.

I think Paul is speaking here of a situation where there is one-sided desire for reconciliation. These are situations in which there is deep, deep injury to a person. It could be unfaithfulness. It could be abuse. I have known many examples where one spouse wants more than anything to work things out, but the other continues to remain abusive and oppressive. In these cases, sometimes separation is necessary but it's reluctant. God says, "Sin will ruin things such that this happens but if you do separate you don't have the right to remarry." And I think this is God's way of forcing us to count the cost. You have two options. Stay married and try to work it out or stay single for the rest of your life. What would you prefer? And there are marriages where singleness for the rest of life is the preferable option because of either abuse or some sort of horrible

situation.

Now here's the question. How do you use this platform for the advancement of the gospel? What can you and only you say from this platform? It would sure be easy to complain wouldn't it? But you would be throwing away your platform. Think about it - every single person in the world is going to tell you what? You got cheated! That person totally messed you over! You deserve to get remarried and move on. You have a right to marital happiness! And it's in that exact moment, that exact moment that you have a totally unique platform. You can say something in that moment that nobody else in the world can say.

You can say, "You know what. I made a covenant to love this person the way Jesus loves me." And they abused me and I had to leave, but you know what I am still committed to pray for them. I am going to pursue them relentlessly with love the way Jesus pursued me. I actually still love them and pray for them every single day. Do you see how that uniquely testifies to how marvelously you have experienced the love of Christ? What this does is it causes people to re-evaluate their worldview. Why would anyone choose to remain single and pray for a jerk in hopes that they could remarry the jerk? Why would anyone do that? Because the love of Christ compels them. Because they are loving their spouse the way they have been loved by Christ. Do you see how unique this platform is? Is it hard? It's beyond hard. It's beyond impossible which is why, when the Holy Spirit give you the power, it is so compelling.

So that's the platform of reluctant separation.

There's a third platform. Paul talks about it in verses 12-14. We will call this the platform of the Loyal Witness.

MARITAL PLATFORMS FOR THE GOSPEL

1. The Platform of Loving Unity.
2. The Platform of Reluctant Separation.
3. The Platform of Loyal Witness.

This is where you have one spouse who is a believer and one spouse who is an unbeliever who agree to stay married to one another.

Before we can talk specifically about the opportunity of this platform we kind of need to clear the air surrounding verse 14. Paul is explaining this marriage union between a believer and an unbeliever and uses some language that sounds very strange in our ears, "For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy."

What is this? Some sort of salvation proxy or something? Well obviously he's not talking about salvation itself since in verse 16 he says, "Who knows, maybe your spouse will get saved."

So what does he mean? Just take it in its most simple sense. What were they worried about. In 7:1 they thought that having sexual

relations in marriage would be defiling. Paul corrects that. This is just a continuation of that thought. What if I'm married to an unbeliever? If it's wrong to unite the members of Christ with a harlot, maybe it's wrong to unite the members of Christ with an unbeliever. Does that kind of intimacy defile me or worse Christ? Paul says no. In that case it works the other direction. It's not so much focusing on the positive effects on the unbeliever as it is alleviating the fears of the Christians that they were somehow defiling Christ. Paul, again is freeing them to simply love their spouses in mind, soul and body without worry about defilement.

Now this sort of tension-filled, mixed marriage would have been very common in the 1st century. You have to remember that Christianity was a brand new religion. There were hundreds of people converting to Christianity. And they were doing it beneath the skeptical, somewhat disapproving eye of Rome. So when you would come home and tell your spouse that you had become a Christian that wasn't likely to be received well.

Of course this same sort of thing still happens today but it was heightened back then because of the fact that it was new and the gospel was spreading. This was a very common problem. But no matter if happened back then or if it happened today, there are many in this room who are in this exact situation. Perhaps you can remember telling your spouse about your encounter with Jesus and you saw eyes of betrayal and anger. That's hard. You understand what Jesus meant when he said I came not to bring peace but a sword that separates husband and wife. I say this to clarify something important. This verse shouldn't be used as encouragement to marry an unbeliever. In 2 Corinthians 6 Paul warns against this. If anything this verse should show you just how important it is to have a similar faith. It's almost like a predetermined

conclusion that it will create strife and tension. The best that can be said is that the spouse will "consent to live with you." Wow, that doesn't sound like a thriving marriage. So if that's the kind of tension that is created by differing faiths, why would you invite that difficulty into your marriage?

Now it is not inevitable by any means that differing faiths end in divorce or bitter tension. So Paul says, if your spouse wants to remain married, then there's your platform. Paul says, "Use it!" vs 16 "How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?"

What can you and only you say about Jesus Christ from this platform? This platform gives you a unique voice. And interestingly, the primary audience here is not the outside world, but your unbelieving spouse.

Your job is to show your spouse a pursuing love, the kind of kindness that lead to repentance. Of course the question is, "how do you do that?"

- I don't think this is primarily going to come in the form of "Wow, look at how much my spouse reads the Bible." An unbeliever doesn't care about the Bible. That isn't very impactful.
- Nor do they care about church attendance or giving or any other religious duty.
- What they do care about is love. Everyone wants to be loved.

Marriage is this incredible unique opportunity to show someone unconditional love.

Now here's how this works. We called this the platform of loyal witness. How can you as a believer be a loyal witness to your

spouse? What is a witness? A witness is someone who saw something first hand and is testifying to its reality. You have someone who witnessed a car accident and they say, "This is how it happened. No, he was traveling East and swerved right here - and he points to a specific spot on the road." Now as a believer married to an unbeliever, what exactly are you a witness to? You are witness to the love of Jesus Christ.

And so marriage we have the opportunity to show our spouse what Christ's love is all about, **BECAUSE WE'VE BEEN A WITNESS TO IT**. You show them what it is like to experience it. You take the unconditional love you've experienced, and you pray that the Holy Spirit gives you that same love to extend out to your spouse.

You want to know what the Love of Jesus is like? It's like this, not like this.

Let me take a moment to dive into one specific here. Tim Keller in his book on marriage talks about the power of marriage to recreate your self-image. Now think about this. Where does your self-image come from? I'll tell you where it comes from. It comes from your own successes and failures, but mainly from your failures.

It comes also from the uneven way in which people have treated you over the years. Now you get married and you will be amazed to find that your spouse has the power in his or her hand to challenge the accumulated authority of all the verdicts that have ever been passed upon you.

What I mean by that is pretty simple. If everyone in the world says, "Man you are so beautiful. You are unbelievably attractive." But your spouse says to you, "You're ugly," how will you feel? Ugly. They

reversed the accumulated verdict of the entire world. They hold in their hand that power.

How could it have that power? Because it's not invented by you. It's invented by God with that power. It's the primal relationship.

So use that power to give security and demonstrate unconditional love to your spouse. Make them feel like a king or queen. Give them nobility with your words.

Now the thought of this might scare you. How do I do that? I know myself too well. I'm a critical person. Where do I get the power to affirm in this way?

Listen, when you look at Jesus Christ as merely an example and you look at him loving other people, committing himself to other people, serving other people, you say, I could never attain to that. You have judged yourself correctly. You cannot do that.

But if you look at Christ loving and dying for you. If you look at him on the cross saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and you know he did it for you. If you look at him, here he is. The Great One. The Creator of the universe. "heaven, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him."

He becomes a little baby for you and he is tormented on the cross for you. If you know that personally and if you fill your heart with it, it melts you. It becomes a seed that if you plant it, if you take it off the shelf and if you plant it every single day, it begins to sprout, and it will produce that same kind of love in you. It will enable you to love without residual anger and to open yourself without residual fear. It works. God would not call you to something like this and not equip you for it. You have to look at Jesus and then marriage can take its

course.

When they see this kind of love Paul says, "How do you know husband, how do you know wife if you will not save your spouse?" It's a great platform.

MARITAL PLATFORMS FOR THE GOSPEL

1. The Platform of Loving Unity.
2. The Platform of Reluctant Separation.
3. The Platform of Loyal Witness.
4. The Platform of Involuntary Concession.

Now there is a final scenario here that Paul talks about and that is divorce without the hope of reconciliation. Paul acknowledges the very real possibility that the gospel itself, the person of Jesus will create a rift in the marriage such that the unbeliever wants to leave the marriage. And in that case what do you do? You can't force a person to stay. Let them leave in peace.

I have also known people in these situations where the primary issue, the issue that kept surfacing again and again is you want to be loyal to Christ and I actually hate Christ and I don't want to live with you any more because of that.

And then that person says, "I want a divorce." Maybe the divorce is

finalized and they go off and get remarried. There's no hope here of reconciliation and remarriage. It's over. This is what we are calling involuntary concession. I would never want this, but I can't make someone want to stay. It's outside my control.

Now a couple of thoughts here. Paul isn't recommending this. People in these sorts of difficult situations may find themselves tempted to be intentionally obnoxious about their faith in hopes that their spouse might leave them. That is pretty much the EXACT opposite of what God is calling us to. The exact opposite.

Divorce just adds to the chaos of the world. Divorce removes any change you had of winning your spouse for Christ. No, love, love, love to the bitter end. It's the teary eyed love that says, "Are you sure we can't work this out?"

Now again, here's the question. What can you and only you say about the person of Jesus Christ from this unique platform.

Because again, everyone else in the world is going to say what? Whew. Finally, you are free to move on. Finally that ball and chain is gone. And while it may be over from a marriage point of view, it's never over from a love point of view. You can't just stop. You can't just end loving. It's the kindness of God that brought you to repentance so we must always continue to be kind. The opportunities will be fewer and further between but leverage them.

Do you see Paul's big point. The question is never, what is going to make my life easiest or the most fun. Paul says, don't act on those simplistic desires. Submit them to the larger question of gospel effectiveness. How can I be most effective for the gospel?

- Do you want to get married? That's a fine desire, but hold off for a moment. What is the best decision for the kingdom?
- Is your marriage difficult and you find yourself wanting out? What will give you the best platform for the kingdom.

This applies to anything. Do you want to buy a vacation home, or take on that extra project at work or start a new hobby? All of these things are potentially hook that could drag you away from the heart of the gospel and God is saying, "Be single minded." You

Soft close!

This morning we are going to invite you to minister to one another. Listen, I want to encourage you all to think about your responsibility right now. I just got done with my responsibility as a teacher to teach through this passage and now I'm turning it over to you.

You all have a responsibility right now to minister to one another. Each of you have a unique voice to speak words of truth and encouragement one to another. You can say things I can't say. You can say words that only you can say by nature of who you are and the position he has put you in. And right now we are going to take some time for you to do that. I'm going to put three questions on the screen here for you to discuss and pray through with the person next to you. Maybe you circle into groups of 3-5 or maybe you just talk with the person next to you.

PRAY THIS OUT!

1. Describe the platform God has given you. What can you say that nobody else can say?
2. Resist the temptation to bemoan our platform. How can we move from complaint to unconditional love and bold proclamation?
3. Pray for help in doing this!

Between the last two messages we have blanketed the entire room. You are either single, married to a believer, married to an unbeliever, or divorced. And each of those creates a unique platform for the sake of the gospel. Talk these questions through.

This will be a soft close service so there won't be an official end. We have refreshments in the foyer for you to continue getting to know one another. Please take advantage of this!