

1 Corinthians

Marriage and Slavery

Interpreting the Text:

1. How do you understand Paul's instructions to married couples, to widows and widowers, and to "virgins" or "fiancées" (7:8-28)? Given the historical context (first-century Roman Empire), why do you think there are clear distinctions made here?
2. Paul has stressed several times that the body is an important part of our existence as Christians. What we do with our bodies matters. How does this framing affect how we read his instructions to people regarding their intimate relationships? How does this affect how we view his instructions to enslaved people?

Applying the Text:

1. What can we learn from Paul's discussion of sexual ethics in and out of marriage? How have churches, like the Roman Catholic church, used this text and the "Pauline Privilege" to determine legal or practical proceedings regarding marriage and divorce?
2. How do you respond to Paul's general claim that faithful people should not change their social status but should change their attitudes? How might this have been a pastoral approach to the Corinthians? Do you find it a pastoral approach in today's church?
3. We talk a good deal about an "inclusive" church. Does Paul's openness to people in a variety of circumstances provide a helpful model of inclusiveness? Does he suggest that there are any limits to how open we should be?
4. Notice the distinction Paul makes between what he has learned "from the Lord" and his own opinion (7:10:7:12). Is this a helpful distinction when we think about Christian ethical practice today?