

Title: Can You Relate to that?

Text: Ecclesiastes 4.4-12 and 1 Cor 7

Theme: Why relationships are so important

Series: 1 Corinthians #25

Prop Stmt. Relationships affect us so deeply because they are a reflection of the character and person of God.

A man I know was working on a job recently where everyone was under pressure to get the job done fast. We will call him Jake (not his real name). Jake was basically working 18 hours a day. The incentives were appealing because the company stood to make a lot of money, but the demands were unrelenting. One of the managers on the job was in his 40's, married, and had two children. We will call him Doug. Doug decided that he could not handle the pressure anymore, so on a Friday afternoon, Doug stopped his car in the middle of an intersection, and using a rifle, took his own life. The next day, Jake had to face Doug's crew on the job site and he wasn't really sure what to say. Before they began work that day Jake spoke to these guys who had worked under Doug, and by now, they all knew what had happened. Jake said something like this, "This whole thing is about money. People want this project completed so they can make money. The company building the project wants it completed so that it can make money, and we are pushed and push ourselves to the limit so that we can make money. But money is not the answer. And I want you guys to know that there is a whole lot more to life than making a bunch of money, because money will never give you what you really need. You may want to work for the money, but you need to know that I am not going to push myself to that point because of money. It isn't worth it." For a brief second he thought that what he said may have connected. Reality set back in when the first guy spoke up and said, "Hey now that Doug is gone, who is going to sign our requisitions?"

Some people have no sense of an authentic, deep and personal relationship with another person. A person like that is a shallow person. There is not much there. But we are a shallow culture, and as a society, we tend to worship and celebrate shallow things, which make us very ill-prepared to handle the significant, the deep and challenging issues of life. We are surrounded by a lot of stuff. What I mean by that is both material things and experiential things are often looked to as the source of meaning and even the goal of life. You were not originally made by the Creator to be satisfied by that and you certainly were not re-made by the Savior to be satisfied by that either.

Why did God make you? God created the universe for His glory. God created the earth, not necessarily as the physical center of the universe, but the earth was created as the center of His personal activity because it was on the earth that in addition to creating a garden, he created human life as male and female and placed them in the center of the garden to rule. When God told Adam in Genesis 2.15 to work the garden and take care of it, he was doing more than telling him to grow corn and beans. He was telling Adam to rule, to carry out God's purposes on the earth. It is very interesting to note that immediately following that God said, it is not good that Adam is alone, and God made Eve, because mankind was never made to be in isolation. We were made to live together with other people. This desire and need for relationships is part of our DNA from the

Creator. A car was made to be driven. People were created by God to relate to Him and to other people because God relates with Himself and God relates to His Creation, and in particular God relates to the pinnacle aspect of His creation, which is us. This is absolutely critical for you to understand so that you can not only understand what is going on the book of 1 Corinthians, but this is also critical for you to understand why God has you here on the earth, and why God has designed the church as the means by which He raises His kids.

We are about to begin 1 Corinthians 7 in which God through the apostle Paul deals with some very important issues regarding life and relationships. In this chapter we will be looking at being single, being married, being divorced, being content, and a host of related topics that come up in these 40 verses. But, one obvious point that we dare not overlook is that chapter 7 comes after chapter 6. Relationships in the homes of believers and in the lives of believers have to be viewed in the context of our relationship to Christ and His church. And the relationship of Christ and His church is a reflection of the relationship that God has with Himself.

Let's widen the lens a little bit and look back over the territory that we have covered so far, and then we will widen the lens a little more.

Intro. "What is a church?" 1 Cor. 1.1-9

1. We Deal with Divisions through the Gospel - 1 Cor. 1.10-4.21
(a divided church cannot deal with problems)
 - A. We have to go back to the cross.
 - B. We have to go with God's Wisdom.
 - C. We have to go with God's Ways.
 2. We Deal with Immorality in view of the gospel and the church. 1 Cor. 5.1-13
 3. We Deal with Lawsuits in view of the gospel and the church. 1 Cor. 6.1-8
 4. We Deal with Sin in general in view of the gospel and the church 1 Cor 6.9-20
 5. We Deal with Relationships (Singleness, Marriage, etc) in view of the gospel and the church. 1 Cor 7.1-40
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| Two Gifts (marriage and singleness) | 1 Cor. 7.1-9 |
| Marriage and Divorce | 1 Cor. 7.10-16 |
| Marriage and Contentment | 1 Cor. 7.17-24 |
| Marriage and Ministry | 1 Cor. 7.25-35 |
| Marriage and Weddings | 1 Cor. 7.36-40 |

Now, you know where this chapter is heading. But I want to widen the lens a little bit more so that you can see not only how what this passage is teaching is part of the overall message of the Scripture, but so that you can also see how that your life, your very life is part of God's incredible plan and purpose on this earth.

1. God is Trinity

Consistently God presents Himself in Scripture as one God who is made up of three persons. Father, Son and Spirit are all considered to be God. They are distinct, but not separated. Their essential nature is the same, and we call that their essence. In Isaiah 6, the LORD is clearly revealed as Jehovah Almighty, and in John 12.41, Jehovah Almighty is clearly identified as Jesus Christ. Consistently Jesus is called the Lord Jesus Christ and in 2 Cor. 3.17-18, the Spirit is called the Lord. The title Lord is used for the Father, Son and Spirit. The title God is used of the Father, Son and Spirit. Lord-God Almighty is a title for God who is three in one. “God in three persons blessed Trinity” are the same in essence, but still unique in person. Because the Father is a person of the God-head and the Son is a person of the God-head and the Spirit is a person of the God-head, God is relational.

a. God is Relational

From eternity past, God has been trinity and from eternity past God has been relational. From everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Ps. 90.2) In Malachi 3.6, God says, “I the LORD do not change.” Please understand what I am seeking to do here. I want you to see that God in a practical way is not only the beginning of life since He is the Creator, He is the foundation of your life and your personal philosophy of life. God answers the questions of why for you. Why do relationships matter so much? They matter because God is relational and because God made you to be relational when He made you in His image.

b. God made us in His Image

Do you see how profound of a statement it is in Genesis 1.26, when God said, “Let us make man in our image in our likeness.” As I have said before, that does not mean that God has eyes and ears, nose and a chin. It means that we have personhood, identity and significance that goes way beyond any other part of God’s creation. Dogs do not have the ability to think of themselves as we do. If you look into a mirror, you look at yourself and you think about yourself and you reflect not only on how you look, but you reflect on who you are and what other people think of you. You wonder, how you are perceived, if you are valued, loved, appreciated, noticed, remembered and if you are really important at all to others. You worry about first impressions or lasting ones. Dogs don’t. Dogs do not walk into a room full of people and wonder if their collars are on backwards or if their hair is combed. They do possess the ability to think of themselves outside of themselves. Birds do not create. They build, but they do not create. They build nests because their God-given DNA programs them to build. Humans on the other hand were given the ability to create. We make cars, trucks, jets, space-shuttles, homes, condos, skyscrapers, and stadiums. We build roads, computers, and phones. We design, plan and improve. We develop shunts for blood vessels, robots for assembly lines and operating rooms, carpet to walk on and vacuums to clean them. All of that is part of being made in

God's image. But there is more. As image-bearers of God who is relational, we were made to be relational beings.

c. We are made to be Relational as a Reflection of God.

Our need for and desire for relations come from our Creator who made us that way. But in addition to that, our relationships were intended by God to be a reflection of God. The final two verses of Genesis 2 makes this point so clear. God intended the marriage relationship to be a union of two lives into 1. Marriage is a bi-unity in the way that God is tri-unity. Before sin came into the world, Adam and Eve had no isolation, no loneliness, no separation, no covering inside or out because they had no sin and no shame. There was nothing to hide. Adam and Eve were able to enjoy a growing and maturing relationship with each other free from any fear what so ever because there was absolutely nothing to hide. They were absolutely delighted with each other because God made them for each other and made them for Himself.

Then came Genesis 3. Then came the entrance of sin into the world. Sin separates and divides. It brings isolation, loneliness, and a sense of not really belonging. Most of you sitting here this morning know exactly what I mean. You are in a crowd of people and you look around and say to yourself, "I don't belong here." You may smile, laugh, or go along with what others do, but inside your heart is breaking because you do not know where you fit in because you really do not know who you are. You feel lost, afraid, vulnerable and wonder if anyone ever knew what you really thought about and contemplated that no one would ever be your friend. You think that you are the only one who struggles with these sorts of things that everyone else in this world is a little more normal than you. Understand this please! Everyone struggles with this because that is how sin affects us. Sin puts us over in the corner of our world and curses us with such a profound sense of aloneness and makes us think that if we are going to ever really get connected to our world or to other people then we have to pretend to be someone they want us to be, but we dare not be the person that we fear we are. Life affected by sin alienates us from God and it alienates us from genuine, profound relationships. We are like people who meet in the elevator. We know the ride is short, so why bother to expose our true selves.

Sin tragically affected our ability to do life. Instead of moving us closer and closer to true significance, genuine intimacy and authentic pleasure and meaning, sin has substituted having for being, and experience for essence. We look to the clothes that we wear, the size, the label or the speed of the vehicle in our garages, the title of our job or the amount of money on our paycheck as our identity because we are blinded to the fact that God made us for more. We use people to get what we think we want which is like drinking salt water – even that never satisfies. But just as sin has profoundly affected how we view and pursue life, Jesus Christ has even more powerfully affected that. Jesus saves you from sin and its accompanying aloneness, its lostness, its darkness and its isolation and he saves you to a community, a family, a flock a people. (1 Peter 2.10) "Once you were not a people; now you are the people of God." Do you see it now?

2. **The Church is the God-Ordained Community of the Redeemed.**

Coming to faith in Christ, is more than just being forgiven of your sin so that you can go to heaven and meet an angel when you die. Becoming a genuine follower of Christ means that Christ redeems you from self-centeredness and redeems you to a community. That community is not simply a shared experience like watching a movie together or the mutual torture of enduring a Detroit Lions game. It is more than a potluck dinner or a weekend camping trip. It is more than showing up at the same time on Sunday, standing at the same time, singing at the same time wondering at the same time if the sermon will ever end. The church is a community of people who are in their essence made part of each other because we have been made part of Christ. Coming to faith in Christ is being drawn into a covenant relationship with the Triune God who calls us to live with Him and to do life with Him and with others. So, yes...

a. **We Relate Together**

We talk, share, laugh, cry, hope, dream and pray. But we (the church) have been designed by God and redeemed by Christ to relate together differently than others. Our relationships with God and each other are to be a moving toward the recovery of the original relationships that God made us for. That is why...

b. **We Relate Together at a Deeper Level.**

It's okay to talk about the weather, the Lions, the government, your job and the economy. But you can do that at the health club, school, work or with a neighbor. In the church we can in the right way, in an appropriate way, relate together about our fears, our hopes, our failures, our faith, our dreams, our struggles and our personal victories. We can talk about and help each other with real life because of the real truth of the God of the gospel. In fact...

c. **We Relate Together at a Deeper Level in order to Grow**

You cannot grow like God wants you to grow as a follower of Christ without true relationship with the church. But the church cannot help you grow as you ought to grow if the church is just a maze of programs and a whirl of activity that is a mile wide and an inch deep.

3. **Real Growth in Christ demands the Spirit, Word and Church.**

What was the problem in the church at Rome? Relationships between Jews and Gentiles. What was the problem in the church at Corinth? Relationships between the spiritual have's and have nots and also between the financial have's and have nots. What was the problem with the church at Galatians? The relationships between those who were trying to live under law and those who were seeking to live under the gospel. What was the problem in the church at Ephesus? Relationships between Jews/Gentiles, husbands/wives, masters/slaves.

What was the problem in the church at Phillipi? Relationships between Euodia and Syntche. You get the point don't you? Much of the NT was written to deal with the issue of relationships within the church. The church needs to have healthy relationships because God uses the relationships in the church to grow his kids. God is committed to making you like Christ and God has raised up the church as the means to do that. G.C. Berkouwer said, "If you desire a transformed life, you must be transformed within the church. If you desire to be a changed people, you must change the church. If you would find your life, you must lose it within a redeemed and redemptive community that together lives the manner of abundant and exceptional life that God intended for us."¹

This message has 3 goals:

- 1) Understand that your relationships are part of a greater relationship. This will help us understand what is going on in chapter 7.
- 2) Understand that God made the church as the means for you to grow. That demands from you a commitment to the body.
- 3) Understand that as a church we have to be a body that is intentionally designed and functioning to help people grow.

In some ways, we are doing that. In many ways, the foundation for that has been set. But we can, and we must develop this part of the life of our church. In the coming months I will be explaining to you how we can do a better job of this.

¹ G.C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification*, Eerdmans, 1952.