

St. Paul's Dorking Sermon Notes – Jan 22nd 2012

Vision On - Loving One Another

Tough Love – Dealing with Adultery & Divorce Matt 5: 27 - 32



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon:

What has this to do with us and what does this mean for us in the context of loving one another within the body of Christ, the Church? Sadly it has everything to do with us. The answer is simple; both adultery and divorce are prevalent within the church today. Look back to the beginning of the early church to see the difficulties that arose then. Read 1Cor ch. 5,6 & 7. Here is a group of Christians that Paul is seeking to love and care for, and who are mired in sexual immorality. St Paul speaks really tough love into that situation.

It may be distressing to think that the same can happen to us, but it brings us face to face with the fact that we are sexual beings. We were created to be such. We don't walk into church and somehow become asexual, so it's absolutely essential that we learn how to behave with and amongst one another and be able to control our thoughts and actions so that as a church we love and behave in a way that honours God. Read 1Cor.6:19-20. That is the standard that God has set for us.

Adultery is the most widely condemned of the sexual sins; it is mentioned in the Ten Commandments, all four Gospels, and ten other books of the Bible. Read Exodus 20:14; Proverbs 6:32 and Jesus own words in Luke 18 as well as Matt: 5. Adultery destroys marriages. The adulterer shows total disregard for the marriage vows and for his or her spouse. Even lustful fantasies can cloud our judgement and tempt us into actual adultery.

Divorce - in the O.T. law, a man was allowed to divorce his wife if he found something indecent about her (Deut.24:1-4) but wives didn't have the same privilege. Jesus saw the injustice and pain of divorce, though, and said that neither husband nor wife should separate from the other. Read Matt. 5:31-32, Mk. 10:2-12, Luke 16:18. Jesus also said that remarriage after divorce constitutes adultery: cf.Matt.19: 3-9. Divorce is a genuine tragedy, both for the couple concerned and any children. Unfortunately, some marriages are unable to be saved. A viable marriage is a contract of mutual love and respect: When one partner seriously violates the marriage contract, e.g by emotional, physical or sexual abuse, the marriage cannot endure. No one should feel obligated to endure that sort of abusive relationship. The Bible is very realistic. We see examples of relationships at their very best; but we also see examples of their frailty and failure.

How should relationships between the sexes look within the church? God's moral standards, as clearly outlined in the Bible, are incredibly high in every area of our lives. When it comes to sexual morality, 'the bar is very high for Christians.' All of us have to exercise self-discipline, and this is increasingly difficult in such a publicly, sexually aware society as our present one. Our newspapers, televisions, films and computers if we are not careful, bombard us with images that affect both ourselves and our children. We need to be on our guard and ask him for his grace to help each of us.

But in the light of this, I believe that as Christians we need to be very careful to talk about what we are for, rather than what we are against. So, we are for sexual purity; we are for living up to God's standards. In seeking to love one another, how are we to help each other to live up to God's standards? We need to keep teaching these standards, to heterosexual and homosexual, to those who are single and to those who are married. Each of us individually needs to keep examining ourselves to ensure we are not falling prey to temptations. In doing this we must always be full of mercy for those who fail, and who want to change; but at the same time we cannot teach as 'normal' those things which are outside God's glorious desire of sexual purity for us.

Nowhere in the gospels do we read that Jesus condemned those he met who had fallen short in whatever area of life; for example, the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, or in a different area of life, Zacchaeus whose life was transformed just by being with Jesus. Jesus clearly didn't condemn, so neither should we as the church condemn those amongst us who may get caught up in adultery or divorce. Our desire is that all those that are living together should be married, but as the church we are called to love those amongst us who are living together and extend God's transforming grace to them just as much as Jesus does! How wonderful it would be if the message conveyed was that we at St Pauls love homosexuals, and extend God's transforming grace to them, just as much as Jesus does!

The challenge for the Christian Community is to deal with those things that prevent people from seeing Jesus and this begins with our relationships with one another. In all of this may we hold onto this truth that C.S Lewis expressed: 'To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.'



Witness: questions to discuss: Before discussion, read the Bible passages and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer, worship and ministry.

1. How do we love and support people whose behaviour is less than God's best for them?
2. Share together your thoughts and feelings about the tension between loving and not condemning people whilst not condoning their actions.
3. How should relationships between the sexes look within the church?
4. How are we to deal with sexual attraction in a godly way?
5. How would you answer the question – 'What has this to do with us and what does this mean for us in the context of loving one another within the body of Christ, the Church?'
6. Read one or two of these passages: 1 Cor. Ch. 5-7, Jn.4:1-42, Jn. 8:1-11 and Lk.7:36-50. What lessons can we draw from these situations?