

Sex, Food, and Faith-Informed Choices

DARRELL DELANEY

If there is one thing we in the Church know, it is that the Church always faces different issues and challenges. Few of the earliest congregations in Church history knew this better than the church at Corinth, as detailed in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Today, we will see that the issues in the Corinthian church went on and on and on. Paul wastes no time going right into the challenges that they have, whether it be marriage, singleness, divorce, and food sacrificed to idols. All this and more on today's episode of *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we have been in the middle of a seven-part series on the book of 1 Corinthians. In the last episode, we talked about Chapters 5 and 6 of 1 Corinthians, where Paul didn't pull any punches when he talked about sexual immorality and bringing lawsuits to one another in the church; and we also talked about how they need to settle these things outside of court. If they realize they are spirit-filled people, they can have different ways to handle things, as opposed to the people in the world.

Scott Hoezee;

And Paul's bottom line, as we saw, Darrell, in that last program was that they have to remember who they are now. This isn't just some hobby. No, no; it transforms the core of who we are. It is going to transform how we do our job; it is going to transform how we speak; and so, Paul says you cannot do these sexual, immoral things. You cannot keep visiting prostitutes. You cannot keep filing lawsuits against each other over trivial matters. You belong to Jesus now, act like it.

So, that is what we saw before. We have been saying all along in this series, Darrell, that this letter of 1 Corinthians is a reply to a long list of questions and controversies that the Corinthians had sent to Paul, and so, we are going to see a couple more things that they ask questions about in this episode.

DARRELL DELANEY

He has advice for marriage, he has advice for widows...things that he has not experienced, but I believe the Holy Spirit has equipped him for these things; and so, we can readily receive his encouragement in these regards, and in these messages in the letter that he wrote. So, let's look at 1 Corinthians...it is quite lengthy in this first passage that he talks about, but we are going to read it in its entirety in verses 1 through 16.

^{7:1}Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."² But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. ³The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise, the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife does not have authority over her own body, but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but yields it to his wife. ⁵Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶I say this as a concession, not as a command. ⁷I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁸Now to the unmarried and to the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. ⁹But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. ¹⁰To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹But if she does, she must remain unmarried, or be reconciled [to her husband]. And a husband must not divorce his wife. ¹²To 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. ¹³And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ¹⁴For 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. ¹⁵But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances... ¹⁶How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

So, there is a lot of stuff going on here, Darrell, and some of it has to do with some time-specific, I think, 1st Century things. It does look like Paul, indeed, is single. We don't know why. We don't know if his wife died or if he just never got married. We know, probably most of the disciples were married. We know Peter for sure was. There was healing of his mother-in-law at one point, right? So, it is not like all the apostles were unmarried; but Paul is, one way or the other; and he kind of speaks out of that context, but as you said, he speaks into a variety of contexts.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it's a lot to unpack here Scott; I mean, this one passage could be its own series if we think about it; but what is important, I think, to kind of crystalize what we are reading here and what we are talking about, is that God has a vision for how we are to honor him, whether we are single or we are married; and in this current time that we live now, it seems that marriage has become central, and for some reason, we have emphasized it to have more value socially speaking, as opposed to single people; but it was actually the other way around in the Corinthian context, where being single, having one hundred percent devotion to God, was seen as the top and the most holy way to live. So then, people try to take that single mentality into marriage, and so they wouldn't even communicate with each other to not have sex or not make love with each other, but they would say: Oh, I am devoting myself to God; which is really not fair to your spouse if you do not communicate; and so, this is the one thing that we need to know about that is the fact that God honors marriage to be in its right context—sex to happen in the context of marriage. That was his design.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it is kind of interesting, isn't it, right? The problem was, some of the Corinthians were saying sex is no big deal. You can do whatever you want. The one guy had taken up with his mother-in-law, others are going to prostitutes. Now, Paul is turning to a different question in that same letter from people who are saying: Sex is bad, right? I shouldn't even have it with my husband or wife, right? And Paul is saying: No, sex is a gift of God. It is a good thing; it just has to be in marriage; and you know, better to be who God made you to be within the context of marriage, than to just kind of burn, or let it lead you astray, or whatever. So, we are dealing with two different polarities in this same tiny congregation. Some who were being way too casual about sex, and some who were being way too uptight about it, and Paul said: In marriage it is a beautiful thing; it is a gift. So, exercise it there; but if you don't need to get married, you shouldn't. But you know, some scholars, Darrell, have suggested that Paul may have...you have to kind of read between the lines in some of his other letters...Paul may have anticipated that Jesus was going to come again real, real soon; and so, there are some scholars who say he urged people not to get married because he didn't think the Church would last more than a generation anyway...

DARRELL DELANEY

Sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Obviously, the Church would eventually die out if believers don't have children that they raise in the Lord, and then they raise their children in the Lord. That is the covenant, right? That is the idea of God's growing family. We reach out beyond our families, but you know, you sort of start with families, too. So, there are some different cultural, and maybe even some theological crosscurrents here, so that you don't want to take anything Paul says here and make it a once-for-all rule for everybody for all time.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think the fact that Paul has different things to say in these situations, and he is trying to show you the nuance in it, because he will say: It is I (not the Lord) or it is the Lord (not I) ...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

So that you would know who is speaking; because there is nothing actually that is specifically addressing the issue at the moment, then he will say: This is kind of my educated guess, if you will, or spirit-filled guess to address these situations.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is one of those little parts of Bible interpretation that can make life kind of interesting; but the point being that Paul is saying there are lots of different ways to glorify God. A single person or a widowed person who chooses not to remarry can glorify God. A husband and wife, you know, with a full relationship with each other can glorify God. The goal is to glorify God and to use God's gift in the places where God wants them to be used; and that, I think, probably is the bottom line; but, in just a minute, we will dig a little deeper into 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul is going to talk about something completely different, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and now, Darrell, in this part of the program, we are going to change gears for just a bit. Paul will have more things to say about sexuality, but now he turns to something that seems foreign to us. When we read it, we are really tempted to say: Well, this doesn't apply to us, and that is the topic of food sacrificed to idols. Obviously, the Christian religion at the time Paul was writing to the Corinthians was new. It was the newest spiritual game in town, but there were a lot of religions that had been around for a long time in the Greco-Roman culture, some of which sacrificed food to idols, and then they would either burn that food up, or there were some cultures where they would eat it then. They would, you know, cook it in the honor of the god, whoever it was, and then it was a potluck and they would eat that food; and so, the Corinthians obviously said: Should we do that? Would that be wrong? Would that make Jesus unhappy if we attended a party that our friends were holding? They sacrificed the beef roast to Diana, or whatever, and then they asked us to eat it. Is that wrong?

DARRELL DELANEY

So, this is an actual situation that is interesting because I think that we need to understand that idolatry has not left.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Idolatry in the essence of a definition, if I could give one, would be that we give our time, attention and resources to something or someone other than God; and so, in the 21st Century, we might not have an idol store on every corner, but we might have them digitally now. If we look down on our phones, there is an app for that, I am pretty sure. So, it is interesting that God's Ten Commandments are still important. The fact that he is still jealous and he wants our undivided attention is still relevant today; and when you look at the Corinthian church, they are trying to figure out as believers is this okay for me to do or not? The question is: Okay, if idols are not real, do I still have the ability to make a decision, and where is the freedom in that? Do I have freedom to choose or not?

SCOTT HOEZEE

I have a funny story before we get to that, though. A friend of mine was the pastor at a church in Toronto, Canada. Toronto is a very eclectic religious city...one of the most eclectic religious cities in the world. Anyway, my friend preached on this passage from 1 Corinthians 7 on food sacrificed to idols, and he spent the whole sermon basically saying: Well, of course, there is no such thing as this anymore, so what is this like for us today? So, he makes all these analogies, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Then, after the service, a young woman shakes his hand at the church door and says: By the way, I am dating a Buddhist, and on Friday nights we go to the temple and they sacrifice food to Buddha, and then we eat it. Is that okay? My friend is like: Man, I spent the whole sermon explaining this away, and it is just as real for this woman as it was for the Corinthians. So, you never know. That mostly doesn't come up, but you are right, Darrell. What you really want to take away from this is that idols are nothing. Idols are false. So, they sacrifice food to an idol, they have sacrificed the food to nothing...

DARRELL DELANEY

Sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, of course you can eat it. Don't worry about it. It is nothing, right? Unless, Paul says, something else happens.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, to eat or not to eat is the question, right? So, if there is another believer who is new to the faith, that has basically come from that idol worship, and they are seeing you eat this food that is sacrificed to idols, they could be confused or discouraged by that. Paul calls this a stumbling block. You don't want to be a stumbling block to the other believer; so, the question is not whether you can eat it and they will get over it, Scott, the question is: Am I going to love my brother or sister enough to not eat it so that I don't become confusing to them or overwhelming to them at all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul continues this line of thought: Now about food sacrificed to idols, we know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. ²Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. ³But whoever loves God is known by God. So, in other words, that is just what you were saying, Darrell. You know...okay, you have this knowledge...hey, idols are nothing...food sacrificed to idols is nothing; I can eat it. That is knowledge, Paul says, and you can get kind of cocky with that...puffed up...you know, you can get full of yourself, but love builds up, and love makes you say: I do know this is nothing. I do know this is not a real idol—this isn't a real god—this food is not spiritually contaminated; but if it messes up my sister when she sees me eating it,

then love says: Don't eat it.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For her sake, right? Don't trip her up just because you think: Oh, I know everything. No, that is not how we operate, Paul says.

DARRELL DELANEY

Sometimes people think, especially in the Greco-Roman world, knowledge made you sophisticated...knowledge made you significant...it gave you your value; but your value should not come from the information that you know. Your value, Scott, should come from the fact that God knows you...#1...and #2, you have the choice to make if you are going to sacrifice your convenience and your freedom to love a brother or sister; and that is the challenge, the sacrifice that needs to happen so they don't become a stumbling block to one another.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he says exactly that. You go a little bit deeper to verse 9: Be careful (Paul says) that the exercise of *your* rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge... ¹³Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

Put your own self aside, Paul says, so you don't mess up somebody else, for whom Christ died...I like how he throws it in there...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes; a zinger.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; this is your brother and sister, be kind to them; don't mess them up.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, because, Scott, we have a relationship and fellowship with our brother and sister in Christ, we have to actually model the kind of godly example that they should model; and so, Paul has been going through these different things of how not to behave because of the fact that God has brought us into a union relationship with him; and so, in this situation, when he is talking about this food that is sacrificed to idols, it is clear that idols aren't real. Okay, we get that, but are you going to make the choice to sacrifice it for love instead of keeping your knowledge and indulging yourself and hurting your fellow believer? That is something we don't accept, and I don't think that is okay.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly. So, I just told a story a while ago about a person who actually did have to deal with food sacrificed to idols, but what are some of the equivalents of this? Well, you know, it depends on your context, it depends where you are, but let's say you know, as a believer, that it is okay to drink wine or to have a cocktail, but if you have brothers or sisters who are new to the faith or who think it is wrong, then don't drink in their presence, right? Don't do something they think is spiritually problematic. Just don't drink wine tonight, for their sake, right? Or it could be something else, or something you do on a Sunday. You know, you have a neighbor who thinks: Oh, man; you cannot do that on a Sunday. It is the Lord's Day. Well, you maybe know that it is not wrong to do whatever it is you want to do...play a ballgame or something...but if your neighbor is going to get upset about it, then don't do it when they are around, right? Your knowledge shouldn't be more important than your love, and I think that is Paul's main point.

DARRELL DELANEY

I agree with you, Scott. Coming up next, we want to talk about how God shows the very example that Paul has been trying to get the Corinthian believers to understand; so, stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this fourth episode on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians...the first letter *we* have. We have been mentioning, Darrell, that there were probably three, four, or five actual letters; and this letter actually refers to a previous letter Paul wrote that we don't have; and this letter is a reply to a letter Paul received from the Corinthians with a long list of questions, and Paul is replying to each issue in turn. So, we have already seen discussions on the wisdom of the cross, conversations about sexuality, marriage, singleness, divorce, lawsuits among believers, food sacrificed to idols we just looked at. So, this is what Paul has been teaching, but the bottom line, Darrell, in all of it is understanding who they are...

DARRELL DELANEY

Identity.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the supreme role of love.

DARRELL DELANEY

I believe that this segment here that we want to get into now talks about the fact that God is the one who actually puts that into practice as a model; and I believe that Paul is borrowing from it, even though it doesn't explicitly say this, where he is showing that this is the example that I want to see among you Corinthian believers, that this is the example coming from God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the previous segment, Darrell, we looked at a passage in 1 Corinthians 8, where Paul refers to sisters or brothers who are weaker, and to be considerate of them, and don't do what you know is okay to do if they think it isn't okay to do, right? Don't be rude...don't upset them unnecessarily...don't become a stumbling block to them; and Paul talks about the strong and the weak in several different places in his letters. Of course, we have to be careful with this in the Church also today, Darrell, because the thing is, is that none of us ever want to be labeled as the weak one, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and none of us should automatically label ourselves as the strong one, therefore, because that is knowledge puffing up all over again...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the same problem in reverse. So, nobody ever wants to be, you know, considered weak. I think there is a sense in which Paul might say: You know, compared to Jesus, and compared to what you were before Jesus rescued you by grace alone, you were all weak, right? You were all vulnerable; you were all in complete need of God's love: While we were yet sinners, God loved us...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Just let that love translate into your everyday life in the Church and in the world.

DARRELL DELANEY

Scott, I think that, too, it also could be helpful for us to think about the “weaker believer” as those in a different stage of faith. So, as disciples, everybody is not going to go from zero to maturity—from milk to meat—overnight; and so, the fact that there are new believers that are coming in that are just learning about what idols are and what they are not, I think it is important to know that they may be a little weaker in their faith than someone who has been walking with Jesus for a few more years than them to understand the doctrine and the teaching about idols and how they are not real, and the freedom that Christ gives us. So, it is not fair for the older believer to tell the newer believer: Oh, you just gotta get over it. I have to be the one who will sacrifice and love and show love for my brother and sister in Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We did a series on *Groundwork* on growth in discipleship. At any given time, in any given church, you are going to have believers at all kinds of different stages in their discipleship; and even beyond stages of discipleship, you are going to have people with lots of different opinions on lots of different issues. We are always...as pastors, as elders and deacons, as ordinary folks in the church...we are always sort of navigating, you know, the path of love to bring more people instead of fewer people along—to keep the Church unified; and very often, that requires sacrifice, right, which given that we follow a crucified savior, ought not be too surprising, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It means sometimes we just keep our mouths shut. It means sometimes we just put in our back pocket something we might otherwise do if certain other people weren't around, but for now, we are not going to do it...we are not, you know, going to engage in that. That is just what it means to love.

I think you mentioned earlier in the program, Darrell, that particularly in the United States, freedom is a big deal: I got rights...I got rights...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, during the global pandemic with COVID, some of that talk about rights tore churches apart, because a lot of people said: I got rights; I don't have to wear a mask...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I don't have to follow what the government says. I got rights. We heard that a lot from Christian believers. Can you imagine what Paul would say to that?

DARRELL DELANEY

I would imagine that he would say what he is saying in Philippians 3, where he counts it all rubbish, because compared to knowing Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior, there is nothing more important than that. There are no claims to fame, there are no values or laurels that we could rest upon; and God knows that about us in

our walk with him. He knows that we have weak consciences, just like the connection Paul is making with the Corinthian believers who are new, and he knows that God has to do a sacrifice in order to have a relationship with us because there is no way we could attain to it. He demonstrates the very love that Paul is telling us to demonstrate to one another, so that we can have access to him, and he puts our need over his convenience, that is the point of what Paul is trying to get to the Corinthians.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Even if it is true that you have rights, Paul would say: Put them in your back pocket for now for the sake of unity and love. I mean, can you imagine when Paul got that letter from the Corinthians listing things like, well, we've got a member who is sleeping with his mother-in-law, and well, a lot of our members are suing each other in federal court. I mean, Paul must have about torn his hair out. You know, he must have wanted to say: What? I mean, he could have just said: Forget these Corinthians. I am so over these people. They are more trouble than they are worth. I am an apostle; I don't have to mess with these...but no; in love, he composes this long, 16-chapter letter, and it is just saturated with love...it is saturated with Paul doing to these troublesome, meddlesome, quarrelling, immature Corinthians...Paul is doing for them exactly what he says we all need to do for one another; which, if you think about that larger picture, it is kind of ironic.

DARRELL DELANEY

He does that, not just once, Scott. He sent them quite a few letters to get them to understand the point, because earlier in the other segment, we said that: The letter I addressed to you already said this; so this is not only review, but it is continued love in repetitive form so that they could catch on that they need the compassion in order to change. Just because Paul has the knowledge, doesn't mean that it is enough. It means that he has to make sure they know.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He loves them, and God loves us, and we need to love each other, and that is the path that the Spirit charts for us.

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we dig deeper into the letter of 1 Corinthians and look at the issues Paul addresses in Chapter 10. Be sure not to miss the next episode of *Groundwork*.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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