



Sermon

14th January 2024

Soul Ties

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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We are in the Church season of Epiphany. I have preached through the gospel passages for Epiphany in recent years so this week, I am going to focus on the Corinthians passage. This is because it is a key text for one of the subjects I want to cover with you about spiritual and emotional health. I said when I got back from the mission trip to Africa, that I felt it was right that I take you through the training material I have built up over 38 years of praying for physical, emotional and spiritual healing for people. I don't intend to do this week on week, but rather from time to time as it seems appropriate – and one of those topics has come up in the Epistle today.

It is clear to me that the Epistle reading was not chosen to fit into this season of Epiphany, rather it is the first of a series of readings traversing the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians:

Year A (2023) Chapters 1-6a

- Divisions in the Church;
- Laxity in the Church's response to an incestuous relationship;
- Lawsuits between Christians.

Year B (this year) Chapter 6b-11

- Sexual Immorality
- Marriage: General principle; Problems for the married and the unmarried.
- Questionable practices
- Instruction for Public Worship including Communion

Year C (2025) Chapter 12-15

- Spiritual Gifts
- Exercising the gifts in love
- Instructions for tongues, interpretation and prophecy
- The Resurrection.

Auckland is built on an isthmus - the narrow piece of land between the Pacific Ocean and the Tasman Sea. The geographical feature called an isthmus is named after the town of Isthmus in Greece which lies on the narrow land bridge separating the Aegean and the Ionian seas. At Isthmus the sea ports were just 5 miles apart and saved the lengthy voyage around the south of Greece. That meant that the place became an important trans-shipment port as well as dominating the North-South land traffic.

In 46BC, the Roman colony of Corinth was established at this point and became an important trading centre and the capital of the Roman province which took in what we now think of as Greece and Macedonia. At its peak, the free population was about 200,000 with another 500,000 slaves in its navy and colonies.

There was a temple to the Greek goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of love, lust, beauty, pleasure, passion, procreation. That temple is said to have had 1,000 female prostitutes. To worship Aphrodite was to visit a cult prostitute!

Sea ports through history have a reputation for immorality and in combination with the worship of Aphrodite, Corinth became notorious for sexual immorality. So much so, that a Greek word was coined, *korinthiazomai* – to live like a Corinthian in the practice of sexual immorality.

As we pick up our passage today, we find Paul addressing this problem of sexual immorality.

We know that Paul is replying to a letter the Corinthian church has sent him with various questions and arguments in it. They have argued that they have right to do anything. They have argued that just as eating is a natural bodily function

so is sexual activity and should not be constrained. Anyway, the body is temporal and picking up the heretical Gnostic thinking, the body is evil whereas the spirit is pure. Whatever the body does has no influence on the spirit.

Paul counters these arguments with four questions for us to ask ourselves¹:

1. Is the thing contemplated beneficial to me?
2. Will the practice overpower and dominate me and how will it affect others?
3. Will the practice support the truth that the body is "for the Lord," who created it and intends it to be used for his glory?
4. Will it support the truth that "the Lord is for the body", i.e., that the Lord has redeemed my body?

Paul asserts that our bodies will be raised from the dead and they are important now as well. Because we are in Christ, our bodies are members (that is bodily parts) of Christ. What we do with our bodies we are doing with Christ. If we are in an immoral relationship, we take Christ into that relationship. It applies to any immoral relationship but Paul uses the example of going to a prostitute. He is not being uncouth – as we have heard it was a major problem in Corinth which was considered the moral sinkhole of the Mediterranean. For that matter it is a problem around the world. In my ministry, 3 have prayed with 3 men who have used prostitutes and 2 women who have been prostitutes.

Paul takes the spiritual unity of Christ with his people very seriously. Christian's spirits are united with Christ. He also takes the physical union of sexual partnering very seriously. The sexual union causes the two to become one flesh. So if a Christian unites with a prostitute he has united the Spirit of Christ with the body of the prostitute.

There is something mystical but, none the less, very real about this oneness. Sexual union is designed to bind husband and wife together. Anyone praying deeply with people soon learns that sexual unions tie people together and this can have serious effects of emotional and spiritual distress and confusion when the relationship is broken and worse still, when relationships are multiplied.

Paul warns that sinning sexually is uniquely sinning against oneself. Perhaps he was thinking about Proverbs 6:32 "... a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself."

Paul expects them and us to know these things:

v15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

v16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?

v19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit – you are not your own?

We have the wonderful privilege together of being the dwelling of God; we have the extraordinary honour of being temples of the Holy Spirit. Let us not squander these precious and very great privileges for passing pleasures which do not satisfy but actually serve to destroy us. Rather let us offer ourselves as clean vessels for the master's use that he may be able to use us for those good works he has planned for us to do.²

Soul Ties

Now to the prayer ministry principle. For some of you, this may be information which will lead you to freedom from a constraint you have not understood. For others, it will be a tool for your toolbelt to know how to help others.

There is a concept of a soul tie. A soul tie is the joining or knitting together of two people in a particularly strong emotional and spiritual relationship.

These can be good or bad. Good soul ties occur in scripture between husband and wife, parents and dependent children, friends, believers etc. They are intended to hold us together.

Marriage: **Genesis 2:23-24** The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Matthew 19:3-5 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become

¹ Barker and Kohlenberger, 1994, *The NIV Bible Commentary Vol 2: New Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton, P624

² 2 Timothy 2:20-21, Ephesians 2:10

one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

The marriage soul tie is established through sexual union. It binds the couple together to steady and reinforce the marriage.

Family: **Ruth 1:16-17** But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

This is an example of entering into a covenantal family relationship. Family bonds are established naturally between parents and children. They are good in that the parent nurtures, cares for and sacrifices for the good of the dependent child. The child loves the parent and has confidence in and gives obedience to the parent.

Oaths: **1 Sam 18:1 [RSV]** After David had finished talking with Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David.

This was the strong covenant warriors made for mutual support and protection. Warriors would promise to defend each other in battle, and should one of them die, the other would support his family. The modern equivalent would be some sort of relationship reinforced by an oath.

Believers: **1 Cor 1:10 [RSV]** I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

These relationships are good, healthy and the bond between the individuals gives strength and mutual support.

Bad soul ties

Bad soul ties have a coercive, dominating or oppressive quality. They are when the good principle is acting in the wrong situation. Maybe the relationship should never have been entered into – like sex out of marriage. Maybe the relationship has changed but the soul tie persists. Maybe one of the parties is behaving abusively and the tie needs to be released.

The cases I have prayed for or heard of have been sexual, parental and authoritarian.

The act of sexual intercourse causes a bonding together whether in marriage as intended or in casual relationships. It may mean that there is a persistent emotional attachment to a past girlfriend when that relationship is finished preventing a man moving on to an engagement with another. Or a girl may marry and find that she cannot let go of a connection to a previous partner. A wife said that it always felt to her as if there was a third person in the marital bed. Dealing with a soul tie to a previous partner resolved that issue.

Parental Soul Ties

When the child grows, there needs to be a progressive relaxing of parental control as the child learns to be responsible. It is not an easy process to judge. Sometimes we encounter adult children who are dominated by a parent. Or an adult child is too dependent on the parent. This is a failure to adjust the soul tie with maturity. We still want a good tie between adult parents and children, but there should have a freedom which is not true for a primary aged child.

We knew a lady in England whose mother was very dominating. She dictated where they could go on holiday and many details of the daughter's married life. Helen prayed with her and had a picture of an umbilical cord. With the lady's permission, she prayed cutting the cord. The relationship changed. Within a short time, the lady reported that they had a new freedom. Some years later, they chose to buy a house with a granny flat to provide for the mother.

Authority figures

I attended a seminar led by my Bishop in Carlisle on this topic. He also identified there can be soul ties to authority figures – teachers, headmasters, pastors, bishops. When he said that I suddenly understood why I always felt awkward around bishops. I was awkward, tended to blush, stammered and therefore was cross with myself for such silly behaviour. When Bishop Graham said that I realised there was a bondage which needed to be cut. It had developed because when I was a little boy. A wartime friend of my father, a big man with a booming voice would sometimes visit and he was then a bishop. As a pre-schooler I was afraid of him just because of his size and dominating stature. That had developed into an anxiety whenever I was with a bishop – which was quite awkward as an ordained priest.

I prayed immediately and after that it lifted. I could relax and regard bishops simply as people with a particular calling and role. On this last trip to Tanzania, I was at the airport to meet two of our team with Bishop Given. Four other bishops

were waiting for the same flight and Given was introduced me to all of them. Then the man they were waiting for arrived, the General Secretary of the Anglican Communion, Bishop Anthony Poggo of South Sudan. I had a charming conversation with him.

Cutting a Soul Tie

It is very simple to deal with a soul tie. Repent of any sinful behaviour involved in establishing the soul tie and seek God's forgiveness. Forgive anyone else involved. Then use the delegated authority you have as a Christian and cut the tie and set the person (or yourself) free in Jesus' name. It is remarkable how easy and how effective it is.

Practical Application

Maybe you have realised that you are bound by a soul tie as I have talked. It might be a family relationship which is coercive or overly dependent. Is it to do with an authority figure: a teacher, a coach, a priest, a bishop? It may arise from a dissolved marriage or sexual relations. Maybe there was some sworn commitment which binds you improperly to someone.

We can pray this way right now.

1. Ask God's forgiveness for any of your sinful actions to do with this relationship, whether in establishing it or out of your resistance to the actions of other person.
2. If the other person needs to be forgiven, do that now.
3. Cut the tie: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I cut these soul ties and release you from their bondage. Be free now in Jesus' name. Amen.