

Being Christian in Your Calling – 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

Introduction - Right in the middle of his answers to questions on marriage, Paul seems to change topic. Actually, he is using two illustrations to provide context for the next segment of his discussion. He is going to emphasize the principle to “remain in the place in which God has called you,” an idea that shows up in v17, 20, and 24. God is in the process of redeeming a fallen world. He is restoring it, which is not the same thing as blowing it all up and starting over. When we are called to walk with Christ, each one of us should walk from where we are and not necessarily from where we think we ought to be. And this means that our vocations, occupations, and associations do not necessarily have to be pitted against our spiritual life.

Your Calling to Christ – Paul uses the word, “called” or “calling” ten times in vv15-24, and in different ways. We are “called” to peace (v15), we were “called” by God unto salvation (v18, 1:2), and we find ourselves in different “callings” (v20). In verse 17, we see that God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has *called* each one. If someone is effectually called in this way, it is because the Father has drawn him (John 6:44, Rom 8:30). There were men and women, Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, all of them in the church of Corinth, but these divisions meant nothing regarding this “calling” (Gal 3:28). They were all sons of God through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Everything levels at the cross.

Your Callings in Christ – The principle is that every man should begin to walk with God from the place where God called him. God first calls a person into the fellowship of Jesus Christ and then to roles in the settings in which God had placed him. Paul then applies this right where the Corinthians had questions.

Circumcised or Uncircumcised – Jews who had the mark of the Old Covenant did not have to remove their association with their Jewish heritage. While the Jews had *en masse* rejected the Messiah, the signs and rites of the Old Covenant system all pointed to and were fulfilled in Jesus (Gen 12:3, 17:10, 22:17). In first-century Corinth, men would be naked in baths and some sports, so being Jewish was obvious and despised by many Gentiles. For believing Gentiles, what had been required for members of the covenant was no longer (Acts 15:1, 19), being replaced with the sign of baptism (Col 2:11-12). Paul therefore says the incredible: “*Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters*” (v19). The church transcends all ethnic boundaries.

Slave or Free – Verse 19 would be shocking to the Corinthian Jewish Christians, and in a different way the first half of verse 21 shocks our sensibilities. We would expect Paul to outright condemn the institution of slavery as sinful – and he doesn’t. He tells the slave who has become a Christian to not worry about it. Just as the world was divided ethnically, so it was divided socio-economically, even between slave and free. But neither slavery nor freedom counts for anything to the one who is called into fellowship with Christ. He is not indifferent to slavery, “*if you can be made free, rather use it*” (v21), but there is not a call to revolution. In fact, we see him use his personal influence in personal situations (Philemon). If you were a slave, you should remember that your identity is in Christ and you have been set free. If you are free, you should remember (especially around slaves) that your identity is in Christ and you are His slave (v22). Roman slavery was often cruel and it was better to become free if possible. But slavery was oddly sometimes a way to get ahead in some situations, and Paul says don’t use that as your means to a better life (v23).

Your Calling Matters – Look back on v17. “*And so I ordain in all the churches.*” This command to remain in the place in which God has called you is not particular to Corinth; it has implications for all the churches, which means it has implications for us.

Your Primary Identity and the Idols Fighting for First – Prize your calling in Christ as a Christian more than any other recognition or honor. Prize other Christians first as Christians more than any other status they may or may not have. There is a constant temptation to identify oneself by other measures first, but you are called to be in all your other callings as a Christian. You are a Christian parent, a Christian child, a

Christian student, a Christian employer, a Christian employee, a Christian citizen, a Christian neighbor, even a Christian competitor or adversary. Christ trumps it all.

Staying in Your Calling – This is the primary way culture changes its values about status, laws and cultural norms. You stay in your calling, “grow where you are planted” and be peculiar there. God knew where you would be when He called you. Christ’s gospel will gradually pervade all parts of society as yeast permeates a batch of dough. This was the primary way Christianity ended societal slavery, polygamy, and other societal ills.

Know Who Owns You – You already are Christ’s slave, so you don’t have to leave your vocation to pursue Christian ministry. You need to see how you are doing Christian ministry where you are. And you must know that you answer to Christ first for your work and other callings, your attitude about those, and your faithfulness to take responsibility for where you are and what you are doing.

Follow Christ with Abandon – Believe on Him (first). Walk in Him (second). Keep His Commandments (third). See everything around you as having been assigned to you by Him (fourth). Walk in those good works He prepared for you (fifth). Offer it all back to Him (sixth). Rest in Him to produce the final results (seventh).

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Notes for Little Saints

God knows exactly where you are. He knows which family He placed you in. He knows what school situation you are in. He knows the opportunities He has given you and the talents He has bestowed upon you. These are your callings.

With that in mind, fill in these blanks from 1 Corinthians 7:17-24.

“...as the Lord has called each one, so let him _____” v17

“...keeping the _____ of God is what matters” v19

“Let each one remain in the same _____ in which he was _____” v20

“...let each one remain with God in that state in which he was _____” v24

You are a Christian. God is overseeing all of your life even now.

What abilities has he given you in serving Him?

What are your opportunities to serve Him?

What would you like to do for God?