

Text: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

Title: Walk as You are Called

Truth: Be content with your lot in life

Date/Location: Sunday July 5, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

Your “lot in life” is your general situation. Sometimes your lot is good, and sometimes it is not ideal or it is quite bad.

When you become a Christian, you look at things quite differently than you did before, and your eyes are open to things they never saw before. For the Corinthians, for example, those who married and then became born again later realized they were in an unequally yoked situation. What to do about it?

I. The Main Idea: Be Content Where You Are

A. The main point of the passage is repeated three times in this section:

Verse 17: As God has distributed to each one,
as the Lord has called each one,
so let him walk [imperative].

Verse 20: Let each one remain [imperative]
in the same calling in which he was called.

Verse 24: Let each one remain [imperative] with God
in that state in which he was called.

B. God has arranged your current situation, and you should not immediately “bail” on it when you become a Christian. Of course, depart from sin, and as a Christian you will know the difference between sin and your general lot. You would quit drugs and promiscuity, but if your job is not sinful, you can stay in it. That’s what it means to “so let him walk.”

C. God has knowingly called (“saved”) you to Himself in your situation (“calling”). “As the Lord called you” means “in what state you were when the Lord called you to salvation.” Here the word “called” refers to God’s drawing, convicting, convincing, persuading work to bring a person to salvation. It is the effective call, equated by some

Christian teachers to regeneration itself. It refers to the work of God to save your soul. When that happened, God had already arranged for you to be in certain life circumstances. (You do believe, don't you, that God is sovereign over all the affairs of the universe? That includes the circumstances of *your* life.)

- D. The end of verse 17 adds this phrase: "And so I ordain in all the churches." This is a general Christian teaching—not just for the Corinthians. It speaks to all Christians at all times. With wisdom, this can be successfully applied at all times. If you are somewhat uncertain about how it applies in your case, speak with a good Christian friend or pastor who can give some hopefully objective analysis as an outsider to your situation.
- E. This instruction really helps if you are in a rut of feeling entirely discontented with where you are in life—where God has placed you.

II. Examples – In What State Were You Called?

- A. The question relates to what we studied earlier about marriage. If you were saved while in a home with an unbeliever, stay in that relationship. Be content with where God has placed you. If you were saved as a single person, do not run out immediately and seek to get married "just because" you are discontent with your present state.
- B. **Were you circumcised?** (v. 18a) Do not become uncircumcised. For those who understand the physical implications of circumcision, this probably seems strange. But a circumcised person might desire surgery to undo the effect of circumcision. A Jewish man, circumcised at 8 days old, who later became a Christian, may think it is necessary to erase the mark of his Jewishness to be fully "switched over" to Christianity. But Paul is saying that is not at all the case. You can be 100% Christian if you are a Jew. That is, you can be both Jew and Christian.
 - 1. That should not shock anyone as long as you understand *Jewishness* to refer to physical lineage and religious heritage, and *Christian-ness* to refer to the fact that you follow Christ. Similarly, many are *Gentiles* and *Christians* simultaneously.

2. The mark of circumcision, which had become a cultural marker, was originally a mark of connection to the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:10). That covenant contained promises for Israel as well as a promise of worldwide blessing which we now know was implemented through Messiah (Genesis 12:1-3). There is nothing shameful in being identified with those things!

C. **Were you uncircumcised?** (v. 18b) Do not become circumcised.

The Judaizers were saying that if you became a Christian, you *had* to become circumcised and obey the Law of Moses (Acts 15:5).

What they were doing is trying to put the believers under a yoke of bondage that not even the Jewish people could fulfill (Acts 15:10, Gal. 5:1). The Law was un-fulfill-able. It pointed out sin and never was a way to merit, achieve, or produce righteousness in God's sight.

1. Paul clarifies (v. 19): circumcision and uncircumcision are *nothing*. So don't make them into something.

2. Rather, obeying the Lord is what matters. "Keeping the commandments of God" does not refer to the Law of Moses, for Paul has made clear in several places that the Law is fulfilled and not for the Christian today. This refers to the Law of Christ and the commandment of the gospel, i.e., New Testament teaching.

D. **Were you called while a slave?** (v. 21) Don't worry about it, but if you can become free, do so.

1. As many as 1/3 of people in Rome and certain of her cities were slaves. Think of that...if our church were time transported back to Rome, at that percentage, we would have 25 people or more who are in some kind of slavery or bond-servitude. Maybe the number would be higher because those wealthy and in higher society would not see their need for Christ.

2. How would you feel if that were *you*, you were a Christian, and you wanted to know what to do with yourself?

3. Our lot in life—even slave or free—is far less important than our relationship with the Lord.¹ A person who is saved as a slave does not automatically become emancipated from slavery. That social status is unchanged. What *is* changed is the person’s eternal standing with the Lord and thus their outlook on their temporary enslavement (Eph. 6:5-8, 1 Timothy 6:2). The difference with the circumcision state is that here, you can pursue freedom if it is possible, but with circumcision, you should just leave it alone. Circumcision is nothing; freedom is *not* nothing. If pursued for good reasons, it had beneficial side effects and could permit the person to serve the Lord even more.
 4. Why is this the case with slavery, when that state is so bad? Paul clarifies in verse 22. When you become a Christian, you are freed from a more terrible master—sin. The realization of that makes your physical slavery pale in comparison. If you are called to salvation while you are free, you have just become a slave to Christ. That’s right—a *slave*.
 5. And if you are a slave of Christ, you should do what you can to avoid becoming a slave of men because you and your freedom belongs to a higher authority—Christ, not people. If you let yourself slip somehow into slavery or bond-servitude because of debt, you will lose potential to serve Christ.
- E. We remain “with God” in the state in which we were called. The key is to remain “with God.” With Him, we need nothing else to be content.

¹ That might seem hard to believe, but you have to acknowledge it if you understand Christianity at all. The eternal consequences of unbelief are far worse than the temporary consequences of bond service or even chattel slavery. The usual fine print: of course we are not favorable to chattel slavery, and what I say in these notes should not be mistaken as some kind of tacit approval of slavery. That would be a ridiculous misreading of my entire theology. It is obvious that property slavery is wrong because man-stealing was punishable by death in the Old Testament and condemned in the New Testament as well (Deut 24:7, 1 Timothy 1:10). See my three-part series on Slavery and the Bible for more on this. Christianity is not concerned, *in the first place*, with the social ills of the day, including slavery in Paul’s day. Dealing with those comes *after* salvation.

III. Contentment versus Laziness

- A. How do we distinguish the kind of contentment that Paul teaches here and elsewhere in Scripture, with the kind of attitude that has no desire to advance, grow, learn, try new things, train, stretch for the Lord's work, take risks, etc.? Is it legitimate to excuse laziness with the idea that you are content with your lot, content with your house as it is (leaks and all), content with your job, education, etc.? Does contentment demand passivity?
- B. I think many of us know something is wrong with such an attitude. In spiritual matters, for example, the apostle himself exhorts us to reach forward toward that which is in front of us (Phil. 3:13, ultimate sanctification and resurrection). Solomon adds that whatever our hand finds to do, we must do it with all our strength (Eccl. 9:10). Part of the resolution is found in this passage: "If you can be made free, rather use it." If you are a slave, go for freedom if you can. During the pursuit of that goal, be content with where you are presently. But if you don't make it, be content as well. All along the way, depend on the Lord for wisdom and guidance. Ask Him to lead you and serve Him while you await His provision of an improvement in your lot.
- C. Contentment is defined as a state of happiness or satisfaction. It is being willing to move forward without complaint. It is an ease or peace of mind, an acceptance of your current situation. For Christians, it includes gratitude—giving of thanks—for the blessings God has bestowed. You might say "I am content with my job." That doesn't mean you can't advance. "I am content with my level of education." But you can become moreso. "I am content with my marriage...house...car..." but you might work to improve all three. Today we have to even consider things like, "I am content with my ethnicity and my gender..." In the first century, "I am content with my circumcision status or my social standing as slave or free." Certain of these things are very difficult and costly to change—for instance, marriage or enslavement. Others are somewhat difficult to change, like a job or education. Some are impossible to truly change, like ethnicity or gender. Others are easier to change. In those areas that are attainable, Paul

encourages the potential of improvement of our lot. In those areas where change is not advisable or possible (marriage, enslavement, etc.) he instructs us to change our minds in order to be content.

Of course, there is a holy level of discontent with our current spiritual maturity, *but even in that* we must be content. If we are 1 year old in the faith, we cannot be mature as if we have been 50 years in the faith. God's work takes time and works at different rates in different people.

- D. Carefully weigh the pursuit of the thing you wish for against your responsibilities and God's priorities. If they can be merged successfully, go ahead and improve your lot. Work hard to do so. But recognize some things simply aren't available on the palette of choices before you. And that is OK.

Conclusion

Our sin nature easily falls into complaint about our marriage, job, kids, parents, society, church, etc. It is easy to be discontent. But God calls us to something above discontent, above complaint. He calls us to gratefully live in the state He has called us. That state is sometimes very cyclical and repetitive. It can be *boring*. We are to be graciously stable, taking measured steps to improve our lot if it is possible to do so, and being content with it if we cannot.

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