

I Corinthians Lesson # 16
Our Place of Calling at Conversion
Pentwater Bible Church
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January 24, 2010

1 Corinthians 7: 17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.

The Bible now begins to address a general principle, which Paul affirmed in dealing with decisions affecting a Christian's marital status. That is to be content in whatever marital status one finds themselves. The admonition is simply to stay put. Do not impetuously decide to make a move to a different marital status. For example if one of a couple of non-believers commits their life to Christ and sees the Light so to speak they should remain in the marriage. They should not leave the unbelieving spouse. The same would be true of the unbelieving remaining spouse although in the short term they might not receive these words and seek to leave. The believing spouse as the apostle Peter as state so eloquently might by their behavior cause a conversion. Now, Peter speaks specifically to women as being in subjection to their husbands. By this subjection they might bring about a conversion.

1 Peter 3:1-2 In like manner, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behavior of their wives; beholding your chaste behavior coupled with fear.

To affirm the importance of this principle Paul states it four times. We will see it in verses 17, 20, 24 and 26. The call to conversion radically alters an individual's spiritual life and relationship with their spouse. It does not need to effect changes at all in physical relationships. That is unless those relationships were immoral. The immorality must then stop immediately.

Another aspect of the changes one might want to make that are unnecessary is an immediate job change. This too is predicated upon the assumption that the new believer is not engaged in some immoral activities. God can use us in whatever situation we are when he calls us to Him. This is a rule to all Christians of all times since the inception of the Church at the first day of Pentecost after Christ's ascension.

1 Corinthians 7: 18-19 Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.

The ceremony of circumcision or the removal of the same was a matter of little importance compared with keeping God's commands. The ceremony of circumcision was a very important part of the Jew's relationship with God. They use it as a sign of their covenant with God. In a remote sense it in some ways corresponds to a new believer's

baptism. It addresses different covenants and has different meaning but both are an outward sign of a commitment to God. The Jews used it as a bonding to God although it was done on the eighth day of a baby boy's life. We know that an eight-day-old baby is not going to be able to decide to accept Christ. So the ceremony might be more closely aligned to a baby dedication today in Christianity.

After the fall of Jerusalem to Antiochus Epiphanies in 137 B.C. some Jews aligned themselves with this man's Greek government and sought to remove circumcision from the men (I Maccabees 1: 15-16). We use the apocryphal books for history and not affirmation of God's commands to us, for they are not canonical.

Additional confusion was introduced to early Christianity by a group of Jewish Christians known as the Judiazers. They taught that a new gentile convert must become a Jew first and therefore be circumcised. Paul repudiated this in Galatians chapter 2. He is referring to the first world wide church council at Jerusalem where James the Lord's half brother affirmed that there is no need for a Gentile Christian convert to become a Jew or to be circumcised.

So Paul is addressing the three situations of circumcision as an illustration that outward change does not have an effect on inward conversion. The inner change and a desire to keep God's commandments is what is really important.

I Corinthians 7: 20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

The Bible is again telling us to be content in whatever life status one finds themselves after conversion. The admonition is the same as in verse 17; simply stay put. Do not impetuously decide to make a move to a different marital or job status. Likewise, a Christian's vocational occupation is a matter of little consequence. If one desires to alter one's employment status that can be changed, well and good; if not, it is not a matter for worry. Just don't do it in haste unless the new believer is engaged in some immorality. At the time this was written slavery was legal and so Paul needed to address that too. What matters is that every Christian should realize he is Christ's slave and needs to render obedience to Him. Every vocation then becomes Christian service performed for the Master.

Ephesians. 6:5-8 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

Today we would look at these verses as a Christian's responsibility to his or her employer. The dynamics are the same. Work hard for the Lord and not just when you think your employer is watching.

I Corinthians 7: 21-22 Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord,

being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

There are believers in Christ's Church from every status in life. In Paul's day there was a sharp distinction between free men and slaves. In fact the Jews had indentured servants. Some that made themselves so for debts they owed. There were very strict regulations within the Jewish community under the Mosaic Law regarding slavery and their freedom. There were many reasons a person could become a slave in ancient Israel. This slavery is not what our impression is today.

1. Prisoners of war were sometimes made slaves by the victor of the war (Deuteronomy 20:10, 11, 21:10, I Kings 9:21)
2. If a thief could not make restitution for the property he stole and for any damages, the affected parties could make the thief a slave (Exodus 22:3)
3. Under the Law of Moses, if a man was poor, he could voluntarily sell himself into slavery in order to pay his debts (Leviticus 25:39-43)
4. Ecclesiastes 2:7 mentions people who were slaves at birth. In Joshua 9:27, it indicates that people and their descendents could be kept as slaves forever in some cases. But this happened because of a covenant that God had not approved of (Joshua 9:14, 15).
5. In Old Testament times, if a borrower could not pay his creditors, then they could enslave him (2 Kings 4:1, Nehemiah 5:5, 8)

Anyone who had been enslaved had the right to own property. If someone was enslaved because of debt or poverty, and they could pay off their debt, then they could be freed (Leviticus 25:47-49). Families of such slaves were commanded to redeem them if they could. The maximum amount of time that a person could be enslaved for this reason was six years (Exodus 21:2, Deuteronomy 15:12). But if a slave loved his master, then he could voluntarily choose to become his slave for life (Deuteronomy 15:16). This was typical in cases where a temporary slave married a permanent slave of the master (Exodus 21:5). All debts were cancelled every seven years (Deuteronomy 15:1-11) and all temporary slaves were always freed in the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:54).

All masters of slaves were required to provide for the needs of their slaves (Exodus 21:11). When a slave was freed, the masters were required to give them supplies that they would need in order to sustain themselves (Deuteronomy 15:13, 14), which would prevent them from becoming enslaved again.

If a master seriously injured a slave, then the slave would be freed (Exodus 21:26, 27). The same law "Thou shall not kill" applied to masters and slaves just as much as anyone else (Exodus 21:20). Everyone was forbidden from working on the Sabbath day, and slaves were no exception (Exodus 23:12). They were also allowed to participate in the various festivals and feasts of the Jewish tradition. If a master had no children, then his slaves could inherit his property, even if they were foreigners (I Chronicles 2:34).

If a foreign slave escaped from his master, claiming mistreatment or unjust enslavement, then the Israelites were required to give him the benefit of the doubt and allow him to live in the Israelite cities. They were not supposed to give him back to his

master (Deuteronomy 23:15, 16). The strict definition of slave, “a person over whose life, liberty, and property someone has absolute control” does not apply to Biblical slavery.

The New Testament book of Philemon is written within the context of Onesimus being a slave to Philemon and the discussion centers around the Christian responsibility of both parties.

I Corinthians 7: 23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

This section of Scripture concludes with an admonition that even though a Christian when converted might find themselves enslaved to other men they must be first a slave to Christ. He paid the ultimate price for the release of their souls. His sacrifice of Himself for us gives us true freedom. Slaves could seek freedom under the above-mentioned situations but once believers we are slaves of Christ.

I Corinthians 7: 24 Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

Here in this last passage is another statement regarding serving Christ in whatever calling a new believer finds himself. By staying in the present situation they will be able to share God’s Word with those of whom we have built relationships with.

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