

Principles for Marriage and Singleness, Pt. 2:

Contentment

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[0:00] Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.!

And let all of us have ears to hear what you have to say. For the good of your church, the advancement of your body, and for the glory of Christ.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We are in 1 Corinthians. We're continuing. This is our second week in chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians.

By the way, it's on page 1135 of your pew Bible. As always, I encourage you to open your Bible and follow along if you can. 1 Corinthians 7, page 1135.

Now, if you remember last week, we talked about singleness and marriage. Mostly marriage. And that's the outline of this chapter. It covers singleness and marriage.

[1:16] And last week we talked about physical intimacy in the estate of marriage. Wherein Apostle Paul gave us real-world applications to married Christian people.

Next week, we'll be covering verse 25 to 40. We'll have the practical applications to single people in the church.

But this week, we'll be looking at these eight middle verses of chapter 7, verse 17 to 24. These verses, on first reading, seems like a departure from the first 16 verses and a departure from the later verses.

Because they're not about physical intimacy. They're not about God's plan for singleness or marriage. And so it might seem like a departure. But I wanted to see that here, Paul actually talks about religious and ethnic identity.

About freedom and slavery. It's not so much that Paul is deviating from the focus of the chapter. It's not a detour at all.

[2:26] But rather, in these verses, we have the heart of the whole chapter, of chapter 7. In verse 17 to 24, we see the principle that governs all aspects of our life as the people of God.

whether we are married or single. Or as Paul will expand in the scope in these verses, whether any other situation of our lives, slave or free, Jew or Gentile, these principles that he will share here are meant to govern all aspects of our life.

And so the governing principle is this. As a Christian man or woman, your circumstances should not compromise your freedom in Christ nor your obedience to respond to God's call.

That's the principle. No matter what your circumstances is, your obedience to Christ and your freedom in Christ is not compromised by your earthly circumstance. Paul repeats these three principles three different times in these short verses.

He repeats it in verse 17, in verse 20, in verse 24. And the charge Paul puts to us is to live as we are called.

[3:50] To remain and to live a faithful Christian life in the midst of whatever circumstance from which God has called you. And he drives this point on with two vivid examples.

So let's look. Let's look in verse 17. Let's begin in verse 17. Paul says this, Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him.

This is my rule in all the churches. This is not a command saying you may not change your status. That's not what Paul is saying here.

He's not saying you may not change your job or your location. It's clear that's not Paul's point.

Because we have already seen in the previous verses, the previous first 16 verses of this chapter, where he encouraged God's people, those who cannot lead a celibate life, to go ahead and get

married.

Right? So he's not saying your position is fixed once you become a Christian. You cannot change it. That's not a point. But he's really speaking to the if-only kind of people.

[5:11] And if we're honest with ourselves, we're all, to one degree or another, if-only kind of Christian. There's a susceptibility, there's a temptation to always be an if-only kind of person.

And how often do we say it? If only I was married, I will be able to serve God better. Or as the Corinthians were saying in their context, if only I was single, I would be able to serve God better. My Christian life would be so much better, so much easier, they were saying to each other. The if-only goes beyond just relationships, doesn't it? We ask the question, if only I had more money. If only I had a different, better job. If only so and so my circumstances changes, then I would be able to serve God better.

I would be able to obey Him better. And it's so easy, it's so easy to be a grass-is-greener on the other side type of believer. Always looking over our shoulder, making excuses for our lack of devotion, letting our faithfulness to the Lord be measured based on our changing circumstance.

[6:33] But that's exactly where Satan would have us be. He wants us to be if only Christians. Because he knows such a group of believers are easily swayed by the world and its shifting circumstances and its shifting values.

But here, Paul will have us see the sovereign, all-knowing God. He will have us see that the sovereign, all-knowing God is not oblivious to the state of the life we are in when he called us to himself, when he made us part of his family.

He wasn't oblivious to your circumstance, to your status in society, yet he called you to himself. And so, wishing we're in a different category of life in order to be a better Christian is, as Paul says, a futile exercise.

And so, Paul says to us, wherever you're in, wherever that may be, whatever circumstance, whatever status you're in, don't for a second think you cannot be devoted to Jesus and to serve him faithfully in that present circumstance.

And again, I must remind you, Paul isn't saying that your circumstances must be fixed and you cannot change it. Rather, he's saying you can be faithful wherever you are.

[8:09] Where you are now, even, you can be faithful to God and serve him faithfully and serve him joyfully. So, Paul says to us, as he says to the Corinthians, get on living for God.

Be a faithful witness for God. In whatever sphere of life God has you in presently. Go on, live faithfully for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Live a life of obedience and submission to his lordship over your life. Do it now, not later. Don't wait till things will get better.

In fact, if you're always looking for greener pastures elsewhere, you cannot, you cannot lead a joyous, faithful, spirit-filled Christian life because you're so preoccupied for searching for greener pastures and your life with God will be compromised.

And so, there's the warning then. Get on living for God. And Paul gives two examples to drive his point home. He gives the example of circumcision and uncircumcision and the example of slave and free.

[9:26] Now, it's noteworthy that Paul, in writing to these Corinthian believers, he doesn't shy away from boldly declaring to them the implications of the gospel over their whole life.

Now, the two examples he gives them here are perhaps the most controversial examples he could, he could, he could think of because these two examples are the heated markers of division in their culture and in their world.

And undoubtedly, there will have been markers of division and turmoil even in the church as well. But Paul doesn't shy away from bringing these examples to bear on them and telling them about the implications of God's word and God over their lives.

So, he says in verse 18, was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised?

Let him not seek circumcision. Now, again, circumcision or uncircumcision is in Paul's world a fixed line that puts people on different sides of the line and whatever side of the line you are shapes how you lead your life, live your life, and the kind of people you associate with.

[10:56] The religious implication of being circumcised or not being circumcised affects who you are, where you worship, who you interact with, the kind of people you make friends with, who you

invite to dinner even.

But Paul is saying here that which was at one time a defining line of separation has now been relativized by Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

It's of no significance anymore. So that neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision. They do not count for anything but keeping the commandments of God.

That's what matters. And so in an age where itinerant preachers were going around throughout the Roman Empire telling people that to be a better Christian they must be circumcised.

Paul says to these people these Corinthian Christians as he says actually in all the churches established there is no such thing as circumcised or uncircumcised Christians.

[12:18] It has no value in the family of God. It has no significance. A Gentile Christian if you are one you don't need to get circumcised because it has no impact on your life with God.

And for those of you who are circumcised but who wishes that you were not. Don't worry remain as you are. Don't seek to remove the mark of your circumcision. Remain as you are when God called you to himself.

That's the principle. Serve him as a Christian of Jewish origin if that's what you are. Loving Christ and loving your brothers and sisters in Christ be they Jew, Greek, or barbarian.

And if you are a Gentile Christian don't for a second think of forsaking the gospel of Jesus Christ, of salvation in Christ alone for man-made religion or man-made restrictions by going and getting circumcised.

Rather, serve God faithfully as a Gentile believer. Love your brothers and sisters, be they Jew, Greek, barbarian, whatever they may be.

[13:28] Are you black, white, Latino, Asian, male, female? Did you grow up in the church? Are you an adult convert?

What kind of past life did you lead before God called you? What is your family background? All these things are actually significant parts of who we are.

They're significant parts of our identity. But in the scope of your relationship and in the scope of your standing before God and in the family of God, they are all relative.

They have no significance as to your standing before God or as to your relationship in the family of God with one another. Your skin color, your educational background, your economic bracket, your family makeup, all counts for nothing before God.

What God seeks and what God requires is your faithfulness to Him, your obedience to His Word. Circumcision and uncircumcision has been the defining line of marking access to God for thousands of years.

[14:52] But now Paul says it's of no significance. Now, if that is true of something as significant as circumcision, then it is true of any other walls of division in our society today.

And as Paul says, we must remind ourselves of what Paul says in Galatians 3, in verse 28 and 29, he says, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you are in Christ, if you're Christ, then in fact you're Abraham's offspring, his according to promise. You all stand with equal footing at the foot of the cross.

Christ, all that matters is that you are Christ. That's the only thing that God looks at.

And so Paul says it, and he now uses a second example to drive the point further on to these Corinthian Christians, and I hope to us as well. He says to them, what's your life category?

[16:09] What's the life category that most define you? And he says, are you putting off your life with God because of this life category, this status that you're in?

Let's think of in our age, in our day. What are some of the life categories that we may be in? Are you a student? And you say, well, yeah, I'll start serving God, I'll start being faithful when I finish my degree.

Are you in debt? And you say, well, I'll start really serving God when I'm out of debt. Unemployed?

Are you only in Syracuse for a little while?

You know you're not going to be here permanently? And you say, well, I'll wait till the place where I call home. When I move there, then I'll start getting involved in serving God faithfully. Here is what Paul has to say.

Get on serving God where God has you presently. And he uses a really stark example for the Corinthians. Were you a bond servant? A slave is what he's saying.

[17:16] Were you a slave when called? He says, do not be concerned. Don't let it worry you is really what he's saying. Don't let your status as a slave be of concern to you.

He's not saying, you know, as we will see later, he's not saying that you shouldn't seek to change your status if you're able to. But he's saying, don't let that affect your faithfulness to God.

That's the principle. And we ought to know that at least a third of the population of the city of Corinth were slaves, probably even more.

And it's more than likely, if that proportion, if that's the proportion in the city of Corinth, it's probably very likely that the proportion of slaves in the Corinthian church will have been much higher than a third.

Perhaps 50% or more of these Corinthian Christians were slaves. Remember Paul earlier said, not many of you account to much. You're not the cream of the crop of the society.

[18:20] And so here, he's speaking to a church that is comprised of at least probably 50% slaves. Imagine sitting in the Corinthian church and hearing Paul say that.

what are some of the things that you think are huge markers of your life? Things that are burdens on you? Imagine someone saying, well, it doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter for your life in Christ. Go on living for Christ. And so a church like that, the question in verse 21 is not an apathetical one.

When he says, were you a bond servant when called? It's an apathetical question. It's very true for most of them. And as we read this, here's one of those hard passages of the Bible that so easily offends when we don't come rightly to God's word with the mind of Christ.

It's easy to take offense to this. You might say, is Paul condoning and propagating the institution of slavery? Now, without going into the weeds, let me say a few words about slavery in the New Testament.

[19:38] First of all, Paul isn't condoning nor propagating slavery. That's not what he's doing here. But we ought to understand Roman slavery, slavery in the Roman Empire, was broad.

In some ways, it was just as brutal and dehumanizing as slavery in the 18th and 19th century. But, depending on the circumstance, slaves also, in the Roman Empire, could be household managers. They could be tutors to children of powerful aristocrats. They could have any other position of influence or power within the household.

Think Joseph in Potiphar's house. That level of influence and responsibility. But, nonetheless, no matter what it is, a slave is still a slave.

So, even one as influential as Joseph has no right, except it's granted, by his own master. The other difference in slavery in the New Testament, in Paul's day, was that slavery was not bound up by your race, your ethnicity.

[20:53] There was a certain fluidity in Roman slavery. Some even sold themselves into slavery as a means of upward social mobility. So, but this is the context in which Paul is speaking to these people.

Slavery was the usher status marker in the Corinthian society. If you're a slave, you're a slave. Even after you become free, you're called a freedman, meaning you were a former slave.

And so that inhibits our far up. There are many freedmen that were wealthy in Roman society after they've gotten their freedom, but they still could only go so much in Roman society because they're known as former slaves.

So, it's a very strict mark, marker, and a status marker in Corinthian society. And despite all the differences of slavery in the New Testament with slavery in the 19th century, American chattel slavery, it's still not really a desired position to be in.

Even in Paul's day, all things being equal. And that's what Paul says to them, parenthetically, if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.

[22:12] So, at no point has Paul insisted that your situation as a Christian must be fixed or static. That's not what Paul is saying at all. Instead, he's encouraging them, even as slaves, to take advantage of the opportunity for freedom, if it is possible.

But, the ongoing principle is this. He's saying to all of them, no matter what your status is, your earthly circumstance does not promote, should not promote, or block your spiritual standing, or your spiritual faithfulness.

So, the Christian is called to live out the gospel, through earthly institutions, and through earthly limitations, not in the absence of it.

What I mean by that is that we are not of the world, we know that, we're not of the world, but we're in the world. And God calls us from all different aspects of life.

Now, we're not called to escape those circumstances, but to be faithful wherever it is that God has called us. We are to be faithful and to bear fruit wherever we are.

[23 : 34] We are to live the fullness of our life with God. The obedience which faithful service requires, we're to live it out. All of that does not wait until we have gotten all our ducks in a row.

Rather, we're called to live out the gospel in whatever place, when the good news of Christ's saving grace takes hold of us. And so, Paul continues then, he says to them, verse 22, For he who was called in the Lord as a bond servant, as a slave, is a freedman of the Lord.

Likewise, he who was free when called is a slave, a bond servant of Christ. You were bought with a price. Do not become slaves, bond servants of men.

So, brothers and sisters, siblings in Christ, in whatever condition each was called, they let him remain faithful with God.

These verses run counter to the value system of the Corinthian culture. They run counter to the our value system in 21st century America.

[24 : 47] You were slaves when you came to Christ, Paul says. You are in fact freedmen of the Lord. And those, by the way, a freedman status in Rome culture is still tied, as a freedman, your status is still tied to your former master.

Because your former master now becomes a patron. You have a patron relationship with him. So, they would have understood the term freedman of the Lord. Because that's implying you're not independent of God.

even as a slave. You're a freedman, but you have now a privileged status. A privilege, even though you're a slave, you're privileged status. A relationship of dependence on God, the owner and creator of the world, the universe.

And then he says, likewise, you were free. You were perhaps even masters, owners, of bond servants. When you were called, when the gospel of Jesus Christ came to you and you became saved, you're now bond servants.

You're slaves yourself of Christ. The point is, being a freedman or bond servant of Christ Jesus is a far more privileged status than being the emperor of Rome.

[26 : 10] No matter your earthly circumstance, this much is true. You belong to Christ and therefore to God. You were bought with a price.

Do not become bond servants of men. Paul had told them earlier in chapter 6, 19 and 20, you are not your own, for you were bought at a price. And I would repeat the same words to them.

So brothers, looking over your shoulder.

Rather, be content. Serve the Lord faithfully in the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, the devil wants you to focus on what you don't have.

That's the temptation. That's the same temptation in the garden, wasn't it? He wants you to focus on what you don't have.

[27 : 11] He wants you to focus on your limitations, your shortcomings, your imperfections. And he wants you to bury the gifts God has given you.

Like that last servant in our gospel reading this morning. He wants you to bury God's gifts, to let it lie dormant. He wants you to constantly be of a mind that, okay, well, I'll do it when I'm in a better position.

I'll serve God then. He loved for you to be in that state. But our gospel reading shows that God is not concerned about our status.

He's not his ways and other ways of the world. He's not status obsessed. What the Lord seeks is obedience and devotion to him.

Devotion then leads to putting our talents that he has given us. He himself has apportioned to all of us. He wants us to be devoted and to put to use the talents he's given us to work in his church, to work in the spheres that he's called us for the advancement of the gospel and the glory of his name.

[28 : 32] That's what God is concerned about. God is waiting for the time when everything falls into place in order to serve in the church? Are you waiting for an employment change or changing relationship status?

Are you waiting for a certain credential before you start living in obedience to God's word? Perhaps you're here this morning and you're saying to yourself, yes, yes, I believe in Jesus and I love him,

but I'm not in a place at work or I'm not in a place in my family or I'm not in a place among my friends to start living out the implications of the gospel.

I'm going to wait for a better time to start really living out the implication of the! This is God's word to you, to all of us this morning. All the relationships that you have in the sphere of life that you're in are not to be put on old, rather in the midst of those relationships, in the midst of the troubles, the ups and the lows, the highs and the lows, the joyous moments and the moments of mourning, in the midst of life, you are meant to be living for God, the one who has bought you with a price, to whom you belong.

There are so many ways you can compromise your faithful witness of the gospel if you keep looking over your shoulder. But Apostle Paul wants you to know that you are of more value and worth because of the God given status you now have through the blood of Jesus Christ by which you have been bought.

The price of your redemption proves the value of your identity before God. So, here is how the Father sees you.

[30:35] Not according to any of the things this world holds dear or important. He doesn't see you according to those. all of those things by the way are destined for destruction.

But God the Father sees you according to the most precious thing that he holds dear. God the Father sees you according to the worthiest thing in the whole universe.

He sees you according to the worth of his beloved son, Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, you in Christ are of more worth to the creator and judge of all the earth than all the accolades and the money and the prestige this world can put together.

Do you know that? And if you do, then live freely in the freedom that Christ has won for you. live out of a well-spring heart of gratitude for this status.

What if we see ourselves as God the Father sees us? What if we really truly see ourselves as God sees us? Beloved in Christ, you are clothed in Christ's perfection.

[32:03] you are clothed in his worth, in his righteous robe. So do not pin your worth. Do not pin your worth and your importance on the things which this world holds dear, which is passing away.

Remember, you were bought with a price. do not become bond servants of men.

Let us pray. Lord, we do thank you that you knew who we were. You know that none of our earthly status, lack of it, or ownership of it, means anything before the holy, trice-holy God of the universe.

In fact, we were filthy, mired in sin, dead in our sins, when you came and rescued us and redeemed us by the precious blood of your Son, Jesus Christ.

And now you've transformed us as children of wrath. You've made us adopt the sons and daughters of the living God. Help us, Lord, to be mindful of who we are in Christ.

[33 : 40] Help us to live accordingly. And help us, Lord, to get on living for Christ Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. Help us to live in total devotion and commitment to Him and to His Lordship over our lives.

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