

Being Who God Called You To Be

(1 Corinthians 7:17-40)

This passage contains principles to follow if you are to become who God called you to be. The **situation** in this passage may not apply to you, but the **principles** do. When you read a passage in the Bible, always look for principles, which never change. Therefore, let's look at the first principle for **being who God called you to be**.

Minister locally (7:17-24)

Paul puts it like this: *But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk (7:17a)*. The principle is that conversion radically changes us spiritually but need not change physical relationships, as long as they are not immoral. This principle applies to all Christians of all time. That's why Paul writes: *And so ordain I in all churches (7:17b)*.

Paul writes it doesn't matter if a believer is a Jew who is circumcised or a Gentile who is not. It makes no difference whether a man has been circumcised or not (7:18-19a). Why (7:19b)?

In verses 20-24, Paul tells *servants* not to rebel because if God *called* them while they were servants, they can live the Christian life as servants. He also tells them, if they can gain their freedom, then they should do so (7:20-24). However, even if servants must remain servants, they are each the Lord's *freeman* (7:22a). This means, in Christ, their souls are free from the power of sin. Paul also makes it clear we are all the same in Christ. Why, according to 7:22b?

Paul is not saying that after becoming Christians, we should not try to improve our situations in life. He is saying, even if a person is a slave, or must remain a slave, he or she is still able to live a Christian life. Paul despised slavery and listed it with other horrible sins (1 Tim. 1:10).

Regardless of where you work, as long as it is not illegal or immoral, you can live the Christian life there. You don't have to quit your job or stop going to public school. The principle is this: Grow and minister where God has *called* and planted you.

Paul continues: *Ye are bought with a price (7:23a)*. We have been *bought* by God with the precious blood of Jesus and, therefore, belong to Him. Because we belong to God, we should not become *servants of men* (7:23b). This means we should not become slaves to the ways of the world—drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, greed, success, fame, power, money, or anything else. In verse 24, Paul reiterates the basic principle of this passage. Personalize and write it below:

It doesn't matter if you are in law enforcement, a school teacher, a mechanic, a home builder, a lawyer, CEO, or whatever you are called to, serve God where you are. You are to be a "fisher" of people in the situation God called you. You don't have to become a pastor or missionary to serve God.

To be who God called you to be, **minister locally** and ...

Make decisions biblically (7:25-40)

There is no decision in which this is more important than the decision to marry. This section begins: *Now concerning virgins (7:25a)*. Paul now answers another question the Corinthians had written to him (7:1). He again addresses the subject of singleness and writes, *I have no commandment of the Lord (7:25b)*. In other words, the Lord Jesus did not directly address this situation. However, Paul writes, *yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful (7:25b)*. Paul is *faithful* because he is writing under the inspiration of God.

Therefore, he writes: *I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be (7:26)*. The *present distress*, or crisis, probably refers to the persecution of Christians, in which believers were being imprisoned, tortured, and executed because of their faith. What warning does Jesus give all His followers in John 15:20b-c?

Paul advises, if a man has a wife, he should not seek a divorce. He also advises, if a man does not have a wife, he should not seek one. However, if a believer does get married, it is not a sin. Also, if *a virgin* marries, she has not sinned. *Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you (7:27-28)*.

Paul knows the persecution will get worse, and it did, eventually costing him his life. The persecution would be more difficult for married persons to bear, especially if they had children. Paul just wants to *spare* them additional suffering and pain. Marriage is a biblical option, but single people should always consider the advantages of remaining single until it is clearly God's will for them to marry.

Paul explains: *But this I say, brethren, the time is short (7:29a)*. This probably refers to the coming persecution that would bring Christians horrible suffering. Therefore, he writes: *it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none (7:29b)*. This may mean the persecution would cause husbands and wives to be separated from each other. Marriage is for life, but being married doesn't lessen our obligations to the Lord, even if spouses are separated because of difficulties, such as imprisonment. How does Jesus warn of the high cost of discipleship in Luke 9:23?

Paul continues: *And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not (7:30a-b)*. Neither grief nor happiness should keep us from doing God's will. In this life, loved ones will die, and we will *mourn*, but we are still to serve the Lord. On the other hand, we will have many blessings that make us *rejoice*, such as financial success. However, during those times also, we are not to forget to serve the Lord.

Also, when we *buy* something, we shouldn't act like it is ours to keep (7:30c). Whatever we have, we shouldn't get too attached to it because *the fashion of this world passeth away* (7:31b). We are only temporary stewards of what God has given us. Therefore, remember what fact in 1 Timothy 6:7?

In verses 32-34, Paul compares single and married believers. Paul doesn't say one is better than the other, but unmarried people can have more time to focus their energy on serving the Lord. This is because marriage requires tremendous commitment and responsibility. For a marriage to be successful, both partners must put forth great effort in the relationship. Both must also try to *please* the other and meet each other's needs. If you are not married, you should take time to think and pray before getting married. In God's eyes, marriage is for life, and it is not easy to stay married—the devil will see to that.

Paul explains: *And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction* (7:35). Paul is not saying unmarried believers should remain single, but he wants Christians to know they are free in Christ to remain single or to marry. However, whether you choose to remain single or marry, you must make the decision biblically, which takes time. Therefore, what principle in Proverbs 20:25 applies to marriage?

In verses 36-38, Paul basically writes that if a man and woman want to marry, they should. However, even if they are engaged and decide not to get married, they shouldn't. Marriage should never be due to pressure from parents who may want grandchildren, or even due to a prior agreement, such as an engagement ring. Even if on the day of the wedding, you feel you should call it off, do it! Don't get married just because you are afraid of what someone might think.

Next, Paul writes: *The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord* (7:39). Obviously, the same principle would apply to a Christian man whose Christian wife dies. Remember, if the surviving spouse remarries, it must be *in the Lord* (7:39c), which means the partner must be a Christian.

However, just because widowed believers **can** remarry doesn't mean they **should**. Paul writes: *But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment* (7:40a). Remarriage is not the best choice for every widowed person. Paul may be addressing a specific case, in which he knows the woman would be *happier* if she does not remarry. It obviously depends on the situation as to whether a widowed believer should remarry. Marriage is a good thing, but it is never easy. Also, what does Proverbs 18:22 declare?

Certainly the same is true of a woman who finds a good husband.

Apparently, some in Corinth were contradicting Paul's teaching about marriage and singleness, claiming the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul writes, *I think also that I have the Spirit of God (7:40b)*. This is an intentional understatement because Paul is an inspired apostle (1:1).

To be who God called you to be, **minister locally** and **make decisions biblically**.