

## Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 7:17-24 - Stay the Course...Usually

So we are smack dab in the middle of Paul's discussion about Christian sexual ethics and we come to this passage that seems to be very much out of place. Paul goes from talking about sexual temptation and divorce and remarriage to talking about circumcision and slavery and not changing what you're doing in life. And then in the very next paragraph he goes back to issues about marriage and sexual ethics again.

So what's going here? Why is this paragraph in here? What's going on here is that the commands Paul has giving about marriage and divorce are really just specific commands that are based off of a bigger biblical principle. That bigger principle is this: when when someone becomes a Christian, God doesn't usually want them to make huge changes to their life situation.

And that's the big takeaway this morning: When someone comes to faith in Jesus, God rarely calls them to make drastic changes in their life situation.

You don't need to start figuring out how to become a missionary or a pastor. When you become a Christian you don't need to start thinking about getting a new job or selling your house. You don't need to move somewhere else, you don't need to settle down and get married and have a bunch of kids. Those things are all fine and on the horizon. But not right away.

The examples Paul gives here is that if you're a slave, you don't need to start stressing about how to become free. Freedom is good, and if you can get freedom great. But don't stress. Or if you were born Jewish, you don't need to figure out how to remove the work of circumcision. Or if you're a gentile you don't need to go get circumcised.

That's the bigger principle: God doesn't usually want newly minted Christians to make a lot of changes in their life situation.

"But I thought God wanted us to repent and live holy lives." He does, he wants us to turn from sin and live holy lives. But that doesn't usually mean we need to quit our job, or go get married, or make a whole bunch of other changes to our situation. It just means we need to walk in holiness where we are.

In general, our lives are steady eddies - meaning we're not called to be radically changing things up all the time.

So let's unpack this a little bit:

### 1) God assigns Christians their place in life. Read 17

This is really cool. When God saves a person, he does it intentionally. And it's not just that he specifically chooses someone and gives them faith and raises them from the dead. He does all that.

But his sovereignty doesn't end there. His sovereignty extends to assigning us - his people - to exactly where we are in life. He saves us right where we are and our place in the world is our assignment from God.

When I was younger we'd play soccer and we'd divide people up into their position. We needed a goalie, a sweeper, backs, mids, forwards. We assigned a positions on the field. That's what we did. That's the idea here. God has saved you - brought you on the team - and assigned you the exact position he wants you to play. **And** he put you on the exact soccer field he wants you to play on, in the exact park. He wants you to be holy in that situation.

Are you plumber? Then go be a godly plumber.

Are you a teacher? Then go be a godly teacher.

Are you homeschooled? Then be the light of Jesus at home.

Are you public schooled? Then go be the light of Jesus in class.

Are you retired? Then shine the light of Christ unencumbered with a job.

When I was saved I was the son of divorced parents who were not believers. God saved me and assigned me the task of being a light of the gospel in 2 households. It was very difficult at times. But through it God has done a lot of good.

Did God save you in a rough marriage? Then be a blessing to your spouse.

Did God save you when you were rich? Then go be generous with the money God has entrusted you with.

Did God save you and you're poor? That's fine too. Serve the Lord with the means you have and if you're faithful, one day you'll be entrusted with true riches in the Kingdom.

Some of you were saved into really good family environments. That's your assignment; be a blessing to your family.

You stay at home moms? That is your assignment, directly from the throne of Heaven.

God has placed every one of us where we are on purpose for his glory. And we should generally consider staying where we're at for his glory.

I'll talk about the ability to maybe change where we're at in a few minutes. But this is the general rule. And Paul makes it over and over here. It's not subtle. He switches from saying assignment and condition to the word "call."

In the Greek it's *kaleo*- meaning sovereign the work of God to bring someone into the faith.

**Romans 8:30:** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Eight times in 7 verses Paul mentions being called and that call is in direct relation to your condition or situation. **Read 17-24**

This is the sovereignty of God in salvation and it extends even to your the very condition you are in when you are saved. It extends to your family situation and work situation and whether you're a Jew or gentile, whether your a slave or free. Public school, home school, single, married, widowed, engaged, divorced, remarried. All of it.

I mean, this is so cool. In eternity past God planned that there would be some guy in southern Rhode Island who's in middle management at a retail store in a strip mall who's got a girlfriend and wants to get married. And God calls him into the faith. Boom. And God wanted that guy in precisely his situation for God's glory.

There's a lady in a North Korean slave prison right now who heard the gospel and believed. She heard and believed and God wanted her - in that crazy situation - to bring him glory. Her condition is not awesome. But she serves an awesome God who's grace and glory she will proclaim until she sees

I could go on. You get the idea. God has called people into the Kingdom in all kinds of very specific situations for his glory.

And by and large, he's not looking for us to make big changes. He called us where we are on purpose. Your place in life has meaning and has importance because God put you exactly where you are. "But this thing over there would be better." Maybe. But we know for sure God put you here at least for the time being. So don't underestimate the purpose of God in your life being right where you are.

2) We should normally stay where God has called us. So notice how Paul doesn't just say "God put you here" but he also says "You should stay where God put you." **Read 17-24**

So stay where God has placed you. He says it different ways:

- Lead the life God has assigned.

- Don't seek circumcision / seek to undo it.
- Don't seek freedom / certainly don't seek slavery
- Remain in the condition.
- Remain in the condition with God.

God placed you there, we got that. So Paul says stay there. Where you're at right now is good because it's God's assignment for your life.

I think about the time I was in high school I got this idea that I needed to move away from the Tri Cities. I grew up there, graduated, so on. But I think there's something in young people that just screams "I gotta get out of here - there's nothing going on in this 1 horse town!" And so I left and a lot of my friends left too. And after years I came back to the Tri Cities and I think I had grown up a little and Tri Cities felt like home.

So we bought a house and started dreaming about what living there the rest of our lives would look like. And then 18 months later God made it clear we were to sell it all and move here.

But the point is we often long for greener pastures. We often despise the assignment God has given us. Or we think that it's not important to God. Or we think somehow if we just changed some things in our lives or our condition we'd be doing more for God. We'd be doing more for the Kingdom.

Well, maybe. Maybe not. The gist here is that as believers our first instinct for the Kingdom should be to stay exactly where we are.

And this isn't just a command for Corinth because of their situation. **Read 17**

This is his command for all the churches. It's for the churches in Galatia, Rome, Asia Minor and for Redeemer Bible Church as well. Whatever condition you find yourself in is the default one you should stay in.

So God assigns us our place in life. We should normally stay there.

### 3) It's also okay to consider changing your condition. **Read 20-21**

So just because God called you into the Kingdom in your specific situation and condition, doesn't mean you can't ever consider changing your condition.

Here Paul says if you're a slave try to avail yourself of your freedom. In Roman times slaves could actually work to buy their own freedom. It was a different slavery system than what we had in America. So he says if that's a possibility, do it. If it's not don't worry about.

And he gives a little theological background to temper those who might be in a condition they can't change. If you're free, just remember you're really a slave of the Lord anyway. You're not truly free.

And if you're a slave, remember in Christ you have been set free from sin. The Christian slave has more liberty than any unbelieving master. And the Christian freeman is a slave to the best master in the whole universe, the Lord (Master) Jesus Christ.

This rule to stay in the same spot is not without exceptions. He brings up the issue of circumcision. He says don't change that. Well, actually we see in the book of **Acts 16:3** that after Timothy is saved Paul circumcised him. Isn't that a contradiction? Again, there are exceptions to this rule. He didn't circumcise Timothy because he needed to. He did it so that Timothy could enter into synagogues with him on his missionary journeys. The first place Paul preached at when he got to a city was the synagogue. And to enter the synagogue you had to be circumcised. Timothy did change his condition.

There were also surgical procedures you could have done to remove - to some extent - the looks of circumcision. This was ancient plastic surgery. Paul says don't do that.

So this command is not without exceptions. It's okay to change from time to time. Change your job, change where you live. But remember the bigger context here is marriage.

So in **Vss. 1-6** the command was to continue having intimacy with your spouse. Don't change that; that's a big reason for marriage.

In **Vss. 6-9** he's telling unmarried folks to remain how they are. **Read 6-9**

So he says remain in the single condition you are in. But is it absolute? No. If you need to change your condition because you're burning with passion then change your situation. It's not necessarily a sin to change your situation. **Look** down at **Vs. 36-37. Read**

So if you're engaged to someone and there's no other situations to take into account, then get married. It's not a sin to get married. There are times when changing your condition is okay.

By the way, this applies to other situations too. Maybe you are a plumber and God is calling you to the mission field. Or the IT field or to investment management. If you've done research and received wise counsel that's not always a bad move.

I've known people who felt called to leave their way of life to take care of their parents, or parents who go live close to their children to help.

I had a really good friend who was getting his PhD in mechanical engineering. And we had a couple of long talks about 5 years into his PhD about how much he hated it and how he wanted a wife and just to get on with his life. And my advice was, forget the PhD - go get married. Well, thankfully he stayed the course, graduated and found a wife.

There are times in life where we make commitments that we should see through. Not always, but sometimes.

#### 4) There are times when we shouldn't change our condition. **Read 23-24**

So don't be a slave. Seems like a no brainer. But just in case you weren't sure; here it is,

In the OC you if you were poor you could actually put yourself up as a slave to your neighbor. If they had money and you had debt you could work for a set amount of years to have them pay off your loan. But even then, the Israelites were to take very good care of those who were indentured to them.

In Roman times you could do something similar where you could have a master pay off a debt and you worked for them. The two systems weren't quite the same but they were close. But for Paul this is not an option for believers.

And he uses the gospel as the reason to not become a slave. **Read 23**

Jesus paid for you. Jesus died for you. You are his and his alone. And that bond we have with Christ is paramount. If you happen to be a slave when you are saved, then do what you can. But don't actively put yourself in that position.

Some changes we simply can't make as Christians. We can't actively divorce our spouse as Christians. That's not an acceptable. We can't commit sexual immorality as Christians, that's also not on the table. Again, we know these things. But set in the context of whether we change our lives or not, we need to be clear that there are barriers to what we can and can't do to honor the Lord.

#### 5) How do you know if you should seek change?

1 - Is what you want a sin?

Is the thing you want or the thing you want to change a sinful thing? Then the answer is no. I know we all agree with that, but sometimes in the deceitfulness of our hearts, we just have to get that on the table.

2 - Is what you want going to hinder your walk with Jesus?

Are you pursuing a relationship or a career or path of life that will draw you closer to the Lord or farther away?  
Will there be more temptations or less?

3 - Get godly counsel.

And pay close attention to the people who advise against doing what you might want to do. So often we write off those who push back when really we should ask questions and count the cost.

4 - Can you do it in faith? Would you regret not doing it?

Sometimes when an opportunity comes along it's okay to go for it. It's uncomfortable, it's exciting, it might not happen. But if you can do it in faith go for it.

**Turn to 1 Tim. 2:1-4.**

I want to leave you with this passage because I think it sums up the attitude Paul is getting at. **Read 1-4**

It's okay if your life is peaceful and quiet, not exciting, not riveting. It's okay if you don't have all the crazy stories at the party. "What's new with you?" Nothing. That's perfectly acceptable.

A boring, mundane life that is lived out in godliness and dignity is pleasing to God. God won't be standing there on judgment day wondering why you didn't run around the world with your hair on fire doing a million things. He'll say well done, good and faithful servant.

**Pray**