

1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24

=====

- In these 8 verses, Paul states a theological principle that became the controlling motif for the entire chapter. What is it?

The theological principle is stated in verse 17, and then repeated in verse 20 and verse 24 using slightly different words. In essence, it is to remain as we are without seeking a change. Salvation can come to a person irrespective of his state/condition/situation. The Christian Life can be lived in this world irrespective of his state/condition/situation, if it does not involve sin.

- Paul used two examples to illustrate this theological principle. Locate and discuss them. Are the two illustrations identical or are there differences? If yes, what are they and how does it clarify the theological principle?

Verses 18-19 give the first example: Circumcision and uncircumcision. The issue of circumcision is not likely to be a 'live and hot' issue in Corinth. Rather, Paul chose it so that he can clearly demonstrate the principle he has stated without his readers getting all hot under the collar because a controversial subject has been raised.

The point of the example is simple and straightforward: Whether you were circumcised or not, it does not affect your call to salvation. God has called circumcised people to faith in Jesus, and similarly done so towards the uncircumcised. In the same way, whether one is circumcised or not presents no real obstacle to living the Christian Life. Why? Because circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing! It doesn't matter! What then matters? Keeping God's commandment! Keeping God's commandment is what will "get" you God's smile, not circumcised or not circumcised!!

Verses 21-22 give the second example: Slave or free. Like the first example, the overall message is the same. The fact that you were a slave did not stop God from calling you to faith in Jesus. Therefore in the same way, the fact that you are a slave today will not affect your living of the life of faith before God.

Though the message is the same, Paul here adds two pointers in this second example:

(a) There is a deeper issue of your spiritual identity that you must consider and remember. If you are a slave today, yet remember you are the Lord's freedman. Christ has freed you from the bondage of sin! If you are a free man today, yet remember you are the Lord's slave. You have an obligation to live in subjection to Christ!

(b) Unlike the first example, here an exception is allowed. As a slave, if you can be free, go for it. There is no prohibition placed upon the believer to get freedom from slavery, if he can obtain it in a Christ-honouring way. Note that Paul did not say "if you are a slave, do not seek freedom" but he said, "Do not be concerned about it". Don't get all hung-up on this. Don't make it the matter of your hot pursuit - you must be free! Now, if it turns out that you can be free, get it. But it is not a command to do it! You don't have to! You can still live as a Christian and serve Christ as a slave. This second example illustrates both the ultimate indifference of one's state of life (v21a) and the possibility of having a preference where circumstances allow (v21b).

OVERALL, *the illustrations illustrate the principle that no earthly status such as one's racial heritage or social standing is incompatible with the Christian's calling. Those who were circumcised when God calls them do not advance their spiritual condition by seeking to reverse their circumcision, nor do those uncircumcised when God called them enhance their standing with God by undergoing circumcision. Similarly, slaves are no less accepted by God than are free persons. Both belong to Christ and their social status has no spiritual significance. No condition presents an obstacle to living the Christian Life, since a Christian is now defined by God's call and his identity in Jesus.*

- **What's the significance of "and so I ordain in all the churches" (v17d)?**

Paul is telling the Corinthian Christians that he is not teaching them something new, or that he is placing on them some new principles that are not applicable other believers elsewhere. Rather, every church has been taught these truths and holds to them firmly. If they reject, then they are the ones going a different way from the rest of the churches.

- **What, do you think, is Paul seeking to convey in verse 23?**

He is not talking about believers becoming slaves (physically). Rather, he is warning them not to become enslaved by some of the philosophies floating around, seeking to influence them to seek a change in their circumstances ("Married? Abstain from sex!" or "Married to unbelievers? Separate from them!") in order to be more "spiritual", "more acceptable to God". These are but men's theories, and to believe them and live according to them is to become slaves of men.

He reminds them that they have been bought with a price. Bought by Christ, paid for by Christ's blood. Hence, they belong to Christ and Him alone must they listen regarding how they should live their lives.

- **How would you apply this theological principle in your life today?**