

## I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

### **VIII. The Believer's Duty To Prioritize His Calling Status**

**(1 Corinthians 7:17-24)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid.*
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. Issues like marriage and divorce discussed 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 can become hopelessly tangled in today's world, so Paul revealed an overriding principle in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 to guide and edify us (as follows):

#### **II. The Believer's Duty To Prioritize His Calling Status, 1 Corinthians 7:17-24.**

- A. After giving believers in 1 Corinthians 7:15-16 the directive to let their unbelieving spouses divorce them in hope of keeping relationships positive in hope of eventually leading them to Christ and reconciling the initial marriage, Paul sensed his need to clarify a "more general principle" that governed such complex situations.
- B. Thus, he began 1 Corinthians 7:17 with the Greek expression, *Ei me*, meaning here "Only" (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 593; A. T. Robertson, A Gram. of the Grk. N. T. in the Light of Hist. Research, 1934, p. 1025).
- C. In other words, Paul taught that there was an overriding principle to addressing all complex states that believers faced, that principle being that each believer should lead the life that God "assigned" (*merizo*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 505-506) him and to which God had **permanently** "called" (*kekleken*, the **perfect** tense from *kaleo*, "call;" *Ibid.*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 227; *Ibid.*, Arndt & Gingrich, p. 399-400) him, 1 Corinthians 7:17 ESV.
- D. Significantly, this does not always mean remaining in the same state in which one was saved, for that state could be one of sinful immorality or drunkenness, what clearly violates that to which God permanently called him! Thus, Paul illustrated how this principle applied to various states believers in his era faced (as follows):
  - 1. If God called a believer to trust in Christ when he had been circumcised as a Hebrew, he was not to try to live as if he were uncircumcised, and if one came to Christ as an uncircumcised Gentile, he was not to get circumcised, 1 Corinthians 7:18. Believers are not under the rule of the Mosaic Law that required circumcision, but under the rule of God to keep God's commands to the Church, v. 19-20. [The one exception would be Paul's circumcising Timothy to keep Timothy from being a stumbling block to evangelizing circumcised Hebrews, for the Hebrews knew that Timothy's father was a Gentile and his mother a Hebrew, and his father had not circumcised Timothy, Acts 16:1-3. Circumcising Timothy was **not** meant to make him relate better to **God**, but to remove a ministry obstacle, cf. 1 Corinthians 10:32-33.]
  - 2. If a believer was called by God to trust in Christ when he was a slave, he was not to be concerned about it, 1 Corinthians 7:21a. However, if he could legally gain his freedom, he should do so since that was a better state, and since the believer was also purchased by God with a huge price at salvation, he was not to become a slave of men if he was already a free man, 1 Corinthians 7:21b, 23.
  - 3. However, if one was legally locked into a slavery position or if he was a free man, the Christian slave was actually God's free man and the man who was called to Christ by God while humanly free was actually a slave of God, 1 Corinthians 7:22.
  - 4. Paul's point was that if one was locked into one position or another, he should not concern himself about it, but that if he could legally gain his freedom, he should do so better to be God's slave uninhibited by any demands some human master might make on him that would hinder him from better serving the Lord.
- E. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 7:20 and in 7:24, Paul repeated the principle he stated in 1 Corinthians 7:17, that the believer should remain in the Biblically sanctioned assignment and calling in which God called him, what governs the complex arrangements believers face due to the complications brought on by a sinful world.

**Lesson:** *To handle the very complex relationship tangles believers face in light of their backgrounds from a sinful world, God directs that a believer remain in the Biblical assignment and calling God gave him at his salvation.*

**Application:** *(1) May we stay in the assignment and calling with which God brought us to Christ. (2) If we can Biblically improve our state, God wants us to do so, but if we cannot, He does not want us to be concerned about it.*