

1 CORINTHIANS: MOVING FROM THE CARNAL TO THE SPIRITUAL STATE

Part XVI: Remaining In Our Callings As Servants Ultimately Of God

(1 Corinthians 7:17-24)

I. Introduction

- A. The history of the Church has been marked by questions on whether a Gentile believer should be circumcised or remain uncircumcised (Acts 15:1-35), whether a believer should remain a slave or be free (U. S. Civil War) or what one should do if he comes to faith in Christ and has a very complicated marital history!
- B. Actually, an overriding principle addresses all such questions, and we view it in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24:

II. Remaining In Our Callings As Servants Ultimately Of God, 1 Corinthians 7:17-24.

- A. Following his discussion on what must occur if an unbelieving spouse decides to divorce his believing spouse, Paul added that just as God has "assigned" (*merizo*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 505-506) each believer his lot in life, just as the Lord has called him at salvation, so each should walk in that calling and assigned lot in his Christian life, 1 Corinthians 7:17a. The Apostle Paul added that he made this his rule in all of the churches, what clearly then applies to us in our local church today, 1 Corinthians 7:17b.
- B. Applied to the issue of complicated marital states such as a believer who has been divorced by his unbelieving spouse, Paul would have directed that the divorced believer was called of God to stay unmarried or be reconciled to his spouse hopefully when the unbeliever had come to faith in Christ, 1 Corinthians 7:15-16.
- C. We can broaden the application of this principle to those who trust in Christ with convoluted marital histories (as often occurs today) as follows: God wants them to stay in the state they were when they were saved.
- D. Paul then illustrated this principle with the issue of circumcision versus uncircumcision, 1 Cor. 7:18-20:
 - 1. If God called a man to faith in Christ when he was circumcised, he was to stay in that state, 1 Cor. 7:18a.
 - 2. If God called a man to faith in Christ when he was **not** circumcised, he should stay in that state and not feel obligated to become circumcised for any spiritual reasons, 1 Corinthians 7:18b.
 - 3. In essence, circumcision in the dispensation of the Church is spiritually of no consequence just like being uncircumcised in the dispensation of the Church is spiritually of no consequence, so what matters to God for the believer is that he heed God's commands in his spiritual walk, 1 Corinthians 7:19.
 - 4. Accordingly, every believer is to remain in the same calling in which he was called of God to trust in Christ in regards to his status as being either circumcised or uncircumcised, 1 Corinthians 7:20.
- E. To explain further, Paul illustrated this principle with the issue of slavery, 1 Corinthians 7:21-24:
 - 1. If a believer came to faith in Christ as a slave, he was not to be concerned about it, 1 Corinthians 7:21a.
 - 2. Yet, if he could lawfully gain his freedom, he should do so (v. 21b), and Paul explained why in v. 22-23:
 - a. When God calls a person to Himself at salvation as a slave, in the spiritual realm, he is actually God's freeman to serve the Lord as his Ultimate Master, 1 Corinthians 7:22a.
 - b. When God calls a person to Himself at salvation as a freeman, in the spiritual realm, he is actually God's slave to serve the Lord as his Ultimate Master, 1 Corinthians 7:22b.
 - c. Since the believer is bought with the high price of the blood of Christ, he is not to be the slave of men as to whom he ultimately serves, for he is owned by God Who is his Ultimate Master, 1 Corinthians 7:23.
 - d. Accordingly, whether one remains a slave or becomes a freeman is of no consequence in his relationship to the Lord if he follows the Lord above all human masters in his heart! However, since it is less of a burden to serve our Ultimate Master the Lord when we do not have to function under slavery to a human master, common sense reveals it is wise to purchase or gain our freedom by lawful means in society!
- F. Summing up his comments on unusual marital histories, on circumcision versus uncircumcision and on being a slave versus being a freeman, Paul asserted that every believer should remain with the Lord in the state in which the Lord called him to Christ as being subject to the Lord, 1 Corinthians 7:24.

Lesson: *God wants every believer to remain in the status in which he trusted in Christ as being a servant ultimately only of the Lord, not of men. If one can Biblically and lawfully improve his status such as legally gaining his freedom from slavery, he should do so that he might serve God more effectively as his only Sovereign. However, if a believer has no control over his status and though that status is difficult for him, God still wants him to stay in it.*

Application: *Whether one has a complicated marital history, a complicated history of slavery or complications in any other realm of status, God calls him to stay in that status in which he came to Christ unless he can Biblically and thereupon also legally improve his status so he can better function in liberty from oppression and suffering!*