

Right Where You Are!

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

Intro: I wrote this sermon a couple of weeks ago, before the Corona Virus hit our country.

I entitled it “Right Where You Are!”, never for a moment thinking that you would be hearing this message from your homes.

Please open your Bibles to I Corinthians 7. We will be looking today at vv. 17-24.

What are you to do if you do not like the circumstances of your life?

Maybe you do not like your spouse.

Maybe you do not like your job.

Maybe you do not like the community in which you live.

Maybe you do not like your health.

Maybe you do not like your church.

What are you to do?

Do something about your circumstances. Right?

Make a difference. Change the world in which you live.

Well, you might be surprised to find out that changing your circumstances is NOT God’s highest priority for you.

God has already changed the most important circumstance of your life. And no other circumstance can undo what God has already done.

God does expect something of you.

There is something for you to do.

And you are able to do this whatever the circumstance God has you in right now.

If you let those words bounce off your ears, then what I just said may not seem a big deal.

But if you really heard what I just said, you should have some objections.

The circumstances in which you find yourself are not there, first and foremost, for you to change them.

That is a radical statement.

And if you believe that statement, it will surely change the way that you live your life.

Read I Corinthians 7:17-24.

Only

Greek = If not

Points us to what Paul has just said in verse 16.

By remaining with your unbelieving spouse, there is a very real possibility that through your influence they may be saved.

But “if not”...

If you are not able to save your spouse...

let each person lead the life
that the Lord has assigned to him,
and
to which God has called him.

This is my rule in all the churches.

Can we agree that living your life with an unbeliever is difficult?

I know that living with a believer, due to remaining sin, is not all that easy either.

But being “one flesh” with someone who does not know the Lord Jesus Christ surely is a challenge.

Not to be depressing, but think of some of the challenges.

Your spouse is not striving, in reliance upon and out of obedience to Jesus Christ, to love you as he or she has been loved by Christ.

Your spouse does not know the incredible joy of being forgiven of their sins by Jesus Christ. And so, extending biblical forgiveness is foreign to him or her.

Your spouse is not striving to know the One whom you have come to know and are striving to know and love more fully.

Your spouse has different priorities and values that do not come from the Word of God.

You do not have the assurance that your spouse will spend eternity with you, so the closeness that you do share now is only temporal.

Your children will be influenced by your unbelieving spouse. This is a guarantee. God can and does overcome this influence, but it is still there.

When a couple first gets married, they are hoping for many of the blessings of marriage. They are not looking for the difficulties. They are not seeking out challenges.

But now, they find themselves in the midst of a whole slew of daily challenges.

What is the normal reaction to pain and struggle?

Get me out of this!

Give me relief!

Fix what is hurting!

Change my circumstances so that I will feel better.

But what does God's Word say to you if you find yourself in a difficult marriage?

This is the life that God has assigned to you.

As if this statement might be understood to be too general, Paul repeats himself, using slightly different words.

This is the life to which God has called you.

Your present marriage is not simply the result of your choices. You may feel that you made a mistake.

Maybe you were not following God when you chose your spouse. Or maybe your spouse has fallen away from their commitment to Christ.

Whatever the road that has brought you to place that you find yourself, you must consider that the hand of God was at work in where you are right now.

God has assigned to you your present circumstances. He has called you to them.

Besides being very radical, and difficult to accept, what difference does this make for how you will move forward?

Only when you accept this truth, will you begin to understand that God is more concerned about what he is doing in you through your circumstances, than He is with immediately changing your circumstances.

In fact, you can just as certainly please God in a difficult marriage as you can in a marriage that is full of joy and intimacy.

This is an ipsative thing.

Ipsative (/ˈɪpsətɪv/; Latin: ipse, "of the self") is a descriptor used in psychology to indicate a specific type of measure in which respondents compare two or more desirable options and pick the one that is most preferred (sometimes called a "forced choice" scale).

It is not that God does not care about you having a believing spouse. It is not that He does not want you to have fellowship and joy and intimacy in your marriage.

God even expects you to be pursuing oneness, as much as it depends upon you.

But God has higher priorities than these for you.

There are things that matter to him more than your present ease.

Of course, this applies to far more than living with an unbelieving spouse. It certainly applies to our present Corona virus situation.

And it applies to marriages of believers, that for other reasons are challenging.

In fact, whatever the circumstances in which you find yourself, it is right to say, "God has assigned me this. He has called me to this."

Paul takes the principle he is teaching and applies it in other areas.

- 18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised?
Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision.
Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised?
Let him not seek circumcision.

I think Paul moves into the issue of circumcision and uncircumcision because this was one cause of the factions within the Church at Corinth.

Some were bragging about having a Jewish heritage. Others were bragging about having a Gentile heritage. And some were influenced by the arguments for one or the other. And so they were wishing that they were not what they were.

Paul says, this is crazy. Just accept who you are. Accept the situation that you are in. Quit being consumed with changing the outward circumstances of your life.

They are what they are. Often, when we begin wondering if we have missed out on God's best for our lives, we begin to panic. We begin wondering, "What if only I had made this choice, or not made that choice?"

Brothers and sisters, this is a dark road and full of cliffs over which you can fall.

Only God knows of what might have been. Only God possesses what we call "middle knowledge."
Only He knows what would have been given different circumstances. It is not really for us to ponder long on these things.

If you recognize your disobedience, and have felt the negative discipline of that disobedience, think long enough on your disobedience to repent and begin a life of obedience. But don't dwell upon past choices as if they have the power to ruin entirely your present or future.

- 19 For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but

keeping the commandments of God.

True life is not found in the specific station in which you find yourself.

Where is true life found?

True life is found in keeping the commandments of God.

We so often become consumed with changing the circumstances of our lives.

If God were as consumed with changing the circumstances of our lives as we are, we would surely have much better circumstances.

But God is consumed with our learning to keep his commands.

God wants us to be asking, “What is it that you want from me in the circumstance that I find myself?”

God wants us to continually be seeking Him for the grace to walk in obedience in our circumstance.

And then, God wants us to wait upon him to change the circumstance, or to give us patient endurance, until that day when every challenging circumstance will be removed and we see him face to face.

Now, having this perspective does not make things easier. Not only do we have to fight hard with ourselves to even accept this perspective, but we also have to then deal with how very imperfectly we do actually obey God’s commands in our challenges.

It is depressing to think of how often we fall short of a true life of obedience.

But this is there to drive us to Christ.

²⁰ Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.

We should not take this statement as absolute. As if it were saying: If you have an opportunity to improve your circumstances, you should never take the opportunity.

God wants me to always make minimum wage because that is what I am making now.

Of course not! God does want us to better our lives, if we have reasonable opportunity.

But bettering our lives is not the end all of life.
It is entirely possible to walk with God and to please him while remaining
in the condition in which you find yourself.

Paul applies this in another very difficult circumstance - that of slavery.

21 Were you a slave when called?
 Do not be concerned about it.
 But
 if you can gain your freedom,
 avail yourself of the opportunity.

It is difficult to imagine a more challenging circumstance than being a
slave to a cruel master. Having someone have complete control over your
life, particularly if they are not truly benevolent, sounds horrifying.

But Paul tells slaves to not be that concerned about gaining their
freedom.

OK, if the opportunity of gaining your freedom is made available,
“legally”, then take advantage of the opportunity.

But otherwise, do not consider it that important.

Don't let gaining your freedom be the all-consuming thought in your
mind.

I have never been a slave, except to my own sin. But I do know what it
means to be discontent. I do know what it means to want God to remove
a particularly difficult circumstance of my life.

Well, not that many really. God has given me such a good life. He has
given me far more than my sins deserve.

But do to sin, I can still covet. I can still be discontent. And when I am
focusing on the circumstances that I want changed, it becomes “all-
consuming”. And do you know what I often forget during these seasons? I
forget to focus on what it is that God is commanding me in the
circumstances.

I am so consumed with what I think will make me happy, that I forget that God's present purpose for me is to learn obedience. Happiness will come. But learning obedience to our true Master is most important.

²² For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord.

Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ.

Now we have come to the only circumstance that really matters. It is the one circumstance that God has already changed and which no other circumstance can undo.

What is the circumstance?

It is that God has become our new Master!

Our old master could be thought of in several ways, but all essentially boiling down to sin.

Our old masters were Satan, the world, and our sinful heart.

But God has changed this circumstance. We are no longer slaves to the kingdom of darkness.

We have been brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and he is our true Master.

This is the only circumstance that matters.

And it cannot be undone by any other circumstance in which you find yourself.

Look at Paul's reasoning.

Are you a slave in this world?

It does not matter, because you are a freedman in Christ.

Jesus Christ frees you from this life. You are no longer bound to this world. You belong to Jesus Christ, and to the New Creation. You may have to suffer as a slave in this present life. But your earthly servitude no longer defines you. You are defined by your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus frees you from being enslaved in your slavery.

At the same time, do you have freedom in this world to do what you want when you want?

Not any longer! Not if you belong to Jesus.
You are not free to do whatever you want. You have become a slave of Jesus Christ.
Obedience to Jesus Christ is more important than your freedom.

This does not mean that you do not value your freedom at all. What it means is that you do not place that freedom above obedience to Jesus Christ.

Jesus is your Master.
He is a perfectly benevolent Master.
You will never find a more perfect Master.
Being a slave to Jesus Christ is better than any earthly freedom promised to you.

I can tell you this, but only when your pride is broken will you begin believing it.

Your slavery to Jesus Christ did not simply happen.
It came at an extremely high price to the One who bought you.

²³ You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.

Do you see? The cross changes everything for Paul. It is that which consumes him. It is the only circumstance that matters to him in life. Of course it is far more than a circumstance.

Jesus did not buy you at some external cost to him. He did not pay for you in silver or gold. He bought you with his own blood.

That tells you at least a couple of things.
It tells you how benevolent is your Master. He has given his own life that you could be freed from your previous master: sin, Satan, and the world.

But it also tells you of how very committed Jesus is to your obedience. He did not shed his blood to set you free to live any way you might like. He bought you so that you could learn obedience to Him as your new Master.

He bought you.

You belong to him.
He bought you.
You came at a great price to Him.

He bought you.
Do not live in slavery to any man.

What does Paul mean by this?
He cannot mean, run away from your earthly master. He has just told them to not be concerned about this.
What does he mean then?
He means that as you live out your earthly life in the terrible situation of slavery, understand that your newly created soul is really only enslaved to Jesus.

As you outwardly obey an earthly master, you have been freed to do so “in submission to your true Master.”

I envision the slave smiling in his heart as he goes about his service.
I know something that you do not know.
I really do not belong to you anymore. I belong to Jesus.
He is loaning me out to you for a short time. And so, I continue to serve you. But really, I live every day in service to my true King and Master.

²⁴ So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

It is easy to get to verse 24 and think that Paul is simply repeating himself.
He is repeating himself.
But Oh does he give an extra kick at the end.

para. qew/Î

Para Theo!

The ESV translates “with God.”
A good translation. But I want you to feel the punch. It means “in the presence of God”.

You may be living in a terrible circumstance in this life. But you are not there alone.

RC Sproul and Ligonier ministries popularized the phrase Coram Deo. We are to live our whole lives before the face of God.

Are you in a difficult marriage?

You live in that marriage “in the presence of God.”

Are you in a difficult job?

You work there “in the presence of God”.

Are you living in a body that is falling apart?

You are falling apart, “in the presence of God”

Are you wondering when we will get our lives back to normal and put the Corona virus behind us?

You can never be quarantined from the presence of God.

Whatever your circumstances, you are NOT a slave to them.

You are a slave to Him who bought you with his own blood.

This is what matters.

He has paid for your sin.

He has reconciled you to God.

You no longer are fleeing from the condemnation of God.

You live before the presence of God.

And he is working in you obedience... right where you are.

Amen!