

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

The Principle of Peace and Contentment 1 Corinthians 7:17-28

Introduction

- Paul now gives additional explanation of the principle that God has called believers to live in peace (1 Cor 7:15). He shows that Christians can live contentedly in any situation of life in which God has placed them, because they have put their trust in the God who is sovereign over every area of their lives.
- The level of society or the specific circumstances that a Christian finds himself in are ordained by God, and a believer should live a life of obedience to God in whatever circumstance he has been placed (whether married or single, Jew or Gentile, slave or free).

The Sovereignty of God in the Life of Believers (1 Cor 7:17)

- "Assigned" amplifies on God's "gifting" to each individual believer (1 Cor 7:7) as well as His "calling" upon each individual believer (1 Cor 7:15). This expresses the sovereignty and providence of God in the life of every individual Christian. We should view our entire state of being as a specific calling from God.
- In the context of Paul's discussion on marriage, this general principle reinforces what he had already said to Christian husbands and wives who were considering separation or divorce because they believed they could live more holy lives separately. The general principle Paul discusses here shows that their marital status is ordained by God, and that they should not seek to change that calling of God but should glorify God in that situation.



An Illustration from Circumcision (1 Cor 7:18-20)

- In the New Testament the circumcision and the uncircumcision are frequently used as synonyms for the *Jews* and the *Gentiles*. The typical word for circumcision is *peritemno* (to cut around), and for uncircumcision it is *akrobustia* (having the foreskin).
- "Become uncircumcised" (*epispaoimai*) = here in 1 Cor 7:18 Paul uses a different word which means "to draw on the foreskin." This is the only time this word is used in the NT. Some Jews did this in the times of Antiochus (1 Maccab 1:14-15). Paul used this word to emphasize that the Jew should not try to remove the physical mark of his Jewishness, any more than a Gentile should undergo circumcision so as to appear Jewish. The Jew was called by God when a Jew and is to remain a Jew, and a Gentile is to remain a Gentile.
- "Keeping the commandments of God" (1 Cor 7:19) = Circumcision was formerly an ordinance of God, but it is not what God requires now. This external rite is of no consequence one way or the other. What really matters is our obedience to God in the situation we are in by God's design and calling. Our spirituality does not depend upon our national heritage, so it certainly does not depend upon our marital status.
- The principle is restated in 1 Cor 7:20 = Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. Within his circumstances, a Christian must use discernment to determine the application of the commandments of God to specific situations.
- Obviously this is a general principle and is not to be taken in an absolute sense, meaning that no change is ever permitted. It is clear from the very next verse that Paul's instructions here were not intended to prevent any change in a believer's circumstances. There were some situations where a change of circumstances after

conversion would have been good and proper. For example:

1. When a person was a slave and could gain his freedom (1 Cor 7:21), it was acceptable to do that.
2. When a person was involved in a wicked occupation before his conversion, he should immediately end his involvement in things that are not pleasing to the Lord.
3. When a person was involved in a secular occupation but senses the call of God to some area of service that would make him more useful to God, he should seek to follow that calling as the Lord leads.

An Illustration from Servitude (1 Cor 7:21-24)

- Servitude was very common in NT times. There were probably many slaves in Corinth who had become Christians since the gospel had first been preached there, and many NT churches were established within households. The membership of the church was a mixture of servants and freemen, and the slaves may have rightly been concerned about the implications of Christ's work of redemption for their earthly freedom.
- Paul was saying, "If you were called while in servitude, do not let it cause you concern or give you care." Slavery was usually a permanent condition, but even a slave could be a good servant of Christ. Even this condition was under the sovereignty of God.
- "BUT" (1 Cor 7:21) = Paul is setting up a contrast between serving Christ while in slavery vs. becoming a free man and continuing to serve Christ. In those days there was a legitimate way for a slave to earn his freedom by accumulating his slave price in the temple of some god. Then the master was paid the slave price and the ownership of the slave was transferred from the human master to the god of the temple. The slave was then free of the human master, but technically was the dedicated property of the temple god.
- By saying this, Paul is in no way encouraging slave revolts. Remember that Paul is using servitude to illustrate the principle of peace and contentment within one's God-ordained circumstances.
- In the previous illustration of circumcision Paul had said, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing." Here in 1 Cor 7:22 Paul gives an equivalent saying for the illustration of servitude: "Slavery is nothing, and un-slavery is nothing." A Christian slave is Christ's freeman, and a Christian freeman is Christ's slave. This would be very comforting to a Christian in servitude.
- "You were bought with a price" (1 Cor 7:23) = whether you are a slave or a free man, Christ has purchased you for Himself. We are to glorify God with our bodies (1 Cor 6:20), and we are not to become the dedicated servants of men (a possible reference to the problem addressed beginning in 1 Cor 1:12).
- Paul again states the principle he has been illustrating: "Each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called" (1 Cor 7:24). This brings even more comfort to Christians in specific circumstances, because even a slave can endure difficult circumstances with God at his side. If a Christian slave can continue to glorify God, then surely a believer married to an unbeliever can continue to glorify God in that calling.

Applying This Principle to the Unmarried (1 Cor 7:25-28)

- Paul now applies the principle of peace and contentment to the unmarried believers in the Corinthian church. Evidently they had asked a question about whether unmarried believers should seek to get married at all. Now Paul answers their question in light of the principle he just explained.
- "Concerning virgins" (*parthenos*) = a virgin young woman of marriageable age. Even though in 1 Cor 7:25 Paul uses a term that specifies unmarried young women, the following verses show that he is discussing both the man and the woman who might want to marry (See 1 Cor 7:26 -- "for a man to remain as he is" as well as 1 Cor 7:27-28 -- "bound to a wife...but if you marry you have not sinned"). The Corinthians were asking whether unmarried believers should remain single and celibate, or whether they could marry if they had that desire.
- Paul could not point to any previous teaching of Jesus on the subject of unmarried young women who are seeking marriage. It's as if he is saying, "There is no existing Word from the Lord regarding this issue, but I give my judgment under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit." He is not giving a strict command which must be obeyed, but he is giving "inspired advice" regarding the course of action he thinks would benefit them.
- "I think then" (1 Cor 7:26) = here Paul states the opinion mentioned in the previous verse, which he does not call a command but simply his advice. "Good" (*kalos*) = that which is well-adapted to the circumstances; something beneficial.
- "In view of the present distress" (*anagke*) = impending circumstances with the added implication of stress, need or necessity in those circumstances. It is not clear exactly what these impending stressful circumstances

were, but we do know that the Roman emperor Nero came to power in AD 54 and began actively persecuting Christians in AD 64.

- Paul is referring to a man's existing marital status, and he is addressing the group of believers who are currently unmarried. He could have said, "In the present circumstances it is probably a good thing for a man to remain unmarried, but I am not giving a strict rule which every believer must obey."
- "Are you bound to a wife?" (1 Cor 7:27) = bound by law in marriage (see 1 Cor 7:39; Rom 7:2). *Bound* and *Released* are antonyms which are intended to mean *Married* or *Unmarried*. Clearly Paul is applying the principle he previously shared: "If you are married, stay married; if you are unmarried, stay unmarried." Neither the married nor the unmarried should seek to change their situation as a result of becoming a Christian.
- "But if you marry" (1 Cor 7:28) = here Paul is referring to unmarried male believers who were seeking his advice, and to which he had given his opinion that they should remain as they are. Now Paul tells them if they do get married, they are not sinning. His advice was simply his opinion in light of the impending circumstances, but if they decided to marry they were not committing a sin.
"And if a virgin marries" = Paul includes this phrase to show that what he is saying applies both to male and female unmarried believers.
- Paul's instruction here emphasizes the principle of *Individual Responsibility*, which is a balancing truth to *God's Sovereignty* that was presented in the previous section. Each believer is to obey God's leading in whatever circumstances he has been assigned by God, and this involves making personal choices from among several possible options. This does not always involve a choice between something that is sin and something that is not sin. A believer should always avoid sin, but sometimes his choices are between several options that are not sinful. One option may be good and another option better, but the choice is left to the individual.
- "Such will have trouble" (*thlipsis*) = pressure, tribulation, affliction, stress. This gives us a picture of what would characterize the "present distress" that Paul mentioned in 1 Cor 7:26. Even as Paul was writing this letter to the Corinthians, he himself was experiencing intense pressure in Ephesus (1 Cor 4:11-13; 15:32). Married believers who experience turmoil and persecution cannot escape carrying a much heavier load than those who are single in similar circumstances.
"I am trying to spare you" = it was Paul's intention to help them avoid unnecessary care and tribulation.

Points of Application

- We must remember that God is sovereign over each of our lives. Nothing can touch us that God does not permit and God will always be with us as we walk through whatever circumstances He has ordained in our lives. Remember that you were bought with a price and you are not your own. It's as if a transfer of ownership has taken place and you now belong to God.
- There is an old saying that exclaims: "Bloom where you are planted!" This is a good way for us to remember that we can show forth the glory of God in whatever circumstance or situation of life where God has called us to be His. If we have an opportunity to make ourselves more useful to God, then we should consider doing that -- but in general we should always remember to "Bloom where we are planted!"
- What circumstances has God called you into or assigned to you right now? What are some of the ways that you can declare God's glory and share His riches with others around you -- right where you are now?
- Are there ways that you are not "blooming for Jesus" in the situation where He has assigned you? Ask the Lord to show you how you can change your attitudes or actions so that you can be more and more useful to Him.

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