LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 7 :17-24

Live as you were called

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Hey, welcome back to our Bible study. We're continuing on with our study in 1 Corinthians, we're in chapter 7, and for this study we're going to be covering verses 17 through 24. Not going to take a super big piece of scripture today, but we're going to look at these verses and really do our best to see what the Apostle Paul is saying in them. So let's begin with reading through the passage and then we're going to unpack these verses, all right? So beginning in verse 17, 1 Corinthians 7, 17.

Only 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. 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, for neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a bond servant when you were called? Do not be concerned about it, but if you can, gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. For he who was called in the Lord as a bond servant is a freed man of the Lord.

Likewise, he who was free when called is a bond servant of Christ. You were bought with a price. Do not become bond servants of men. So brothers, in whatever condition each was called, let him remain with God. Let's pray as we get into these verses.

Father, thank you first of all for what the Apostle Paul is saying in this section of Scripture. And we really pray for your Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to hear your voice. So lead us in wisdom and truth, we pray, in the authority granted us through the name of Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen. Amen.

You know, earlier in this chapter, the Apostle Paul hinted at the fact that when people were coming to Christ, it created a lot of radical changes in their lives. In some cases, the one who was married to a pagan found themselves deserted in marriage because their pagan spouse could not abide the fact that they had

come to Christ. You'll remember that Paul talked about that earlier in the chapter. He said, if you have an unbeliever among you and they want to leave, let them leave. And that was happening, frankly, in the early church because, you know, paganism was rampant.

And then, you know, people, two pagans would get married, and one of them would come to faith in Jesus Christ, and the other one would say, this isn't what I signed up for, and they would abandon them. And Paul needed to give instructions related to that. This is some of what was going on in the first century. So now Paul is turning the table a little bit, and he's addressing the believer in these circumstances. And the overall message that he's giving in this section is, wherever God had you when you came to Christ, stay there.

Don't feel like you have to change everything about your life, necessarily, just because you've come to Jesus. Now, obviously, the Apostle Paul isn't talking about those areas of sin that someone might be in. It's assumed that when they came to Christ, that has already been dealt with. That's what repentance is all about, turning away from sin, turning to the Savior. So it is assumed that those things are already dealt with, okay?

What Paul is talking about is the way that people would find themselves in certain circumstances, situations, and they would feel the need after coming to Christ to radically change everything about their past life. And Paul is saying, that's really not necessary. Just walk with the Lord. He begins by simply saying in verse 17, only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him. And then Paul went on to say, listen, I'm not telling you something that I don't tell all the churches.

This is what I tell new believers. When you come to faith in Jesus, after you've repented of your sin, and that's obviously done when you came to the Lord, now just live your life and don't feel like there needs to be this radical overthrow of everything you've ever done. I've got to get a new job. I've got to do this. And it can just kind of be dizzying, you know?

And so he says, he begins to lay out some specific circumstances that someone might find themselves in. He says, 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.

Now, this is something that we definitely would not deal with today. Obviously, circumcision was a mark among the Jews. It was a covenant sign between God and Israel, given originally to Abraham and passed down to his descendants. It became part of the Mosaic Law that each male child on the eighth day

after their birth would be circumcised as a covenant sign of that covenant with Yahweh. Paul is talking now to people who may or may not have received a covenant sign through circumcision, and he's telling them essentially, don't concern yourself with outward things because God is not as concerned about outward things as he is inward things.

Be more concerned about what God is concerned about. God is concerned about your heart. Where is your heart? It's so funny. You know, we do this as Christians.

We tend to focus on what I call externalities, things that are external, things that are outward, and we make a big deal about it. You know, back in the 1960s, when the Jesus movement was kind of getting underway, it was really that movement that launched the Calvary Chapel movement back then. But, you know, a lot of the hippies with their long hair and tie-dyed shirts and so forth and bare feet were finding their way into churches. They were coming to churches. And, you know, back in the 1960s, people were still pretty square, and a lot of these hippies were met at the door, and they were told, listen, you go get a haircut, take a bath, put on some nice Sunday clothes, and you can come back to church.

And that was the church focusing on externals. But thankfully, there were some churches, and Calvary Chapel was among them, who opened their doors to the hippies. Now, not even everybody at Calvary Chapel was happy about that at first, but what Pastor Chuck decided kind of won the day, and they invited these hippies to come in. Some of them, you know, they would sit on the floor, which was pretty odd in a church back in the 1960s. And Calvary Chapel began to adopt an understanding about externalities, that those weren't the important things.

It didn't matter how long someone's hair was. It didn't matter whether they were dressed poorly. It didn't matter whether they came to church without shoes. What mattered was Jesus reaching the inside, the heart of that person. And they began just to preach the gospel and teach the word to these hippies.

And God began to make the changes that were really important on the inside. And really, that's such an important thing to remember. You know, I love the fact that Calvary Chapel and several other churches back then didn't insist that these kids change the outside in order to start walking with the Lord. And that's what Paul is saying here in chapter 7. Just walk with the Lord, wherever you found yourself.

Just stay there. Walk with Jesus. Let him deal with all of the other details of your life. I want you to notice, after addressing this issue, that we wouldn't have to deal with, which is whether someone was circumcised or not. That's not a situation we're going to run into in terms of someone feeling the need to change that somehow.

I want you to notice what Paul says in verse 19 here because this is fascinating. He says, for neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, okay, because those are outward things. But look what he goes on to say what is important, but keeping the commandments of God. That's the important part. Now, someone who is a legalist and who still believes that Christians are under the law of Moses, this verse is going to totally confuse them because Paul says circumcision doesn't matter, uncircumcision doesn't matter, keeping God's commandments is what matters.

And the legalist is going to say, wait a minute, circumcision was a commandment. You read through the Old Testament and you will see that God commanded circumcision for the Jews. And so this verse would make no sense to a legalist because they think we're still under the law. And yet Paul says circumcision doesn't matter. What matters is keeping the commandments.

So you see, he's talking about something different than keeping the Mosaic law commandments. We don't keep those as externalities. You know, I love the fact that in the Old Testament, God gave the law of Moses to the people of Israel on stone tablets because nothing better epitomizes what the law was to them better than these rules written down on tablets of stone. They were external to the people of Israel. And yet God said in Jeremiah chapter 31, I'm going to take my law.

There's a covenant, a new covenant coming. And one of the characteristics of this new covenant is that I'm going to take my law, which has been heretofore on stone tablets, and I'm going to write it on your heart. See, this is what the legalist doesn't understand when we say things like we as Christians aren't under the law. They say, oh, so you're telling me it's just okay to murder? It's okay to steal?

It's okay to lie and cheat and all that? Is that what you're saying? No, that's not what we're saying at all. You see, God has taken his law, that external written on stone tablets law, and he has put it into our hearts through the indwelling Holy Spirit. He has literally written it onto our hearts.

So when we say we don't keep or we're not under the law, we're not saying we're not under any law. We're under the law of Christ, which is now internal. It is no longer thou shalt not commit adultery. It has now become part of me. It is now, I don't want to commit adultery.

I don't want to steal. I don't want to murder. The law has become part of us as believers, and that's the beauty of what God has done in the new covenant, and that's why Paul says externalities like circumcision or lack thereof, those are not the things that matter. What matters is following the law of the Spirit, and that's what we believers follow now. It's not an external law.

It's an internal law. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you? How is he leading you? How is he directing you? We trust the Holy Spirit to lead us appropriately because he is the law giver.

So he speaks to us about the law. So this is how we understand the change, the transformation between the old covenant that Israel was under and the new covenant that we are now under through Jesus Christ, our Lord. And this is some of what Paul is trying to say in this section of 1 Corinthians, right? So verse 20 goes on. He says, each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.

Now, that word condition in the Greek is literally where we normally would see the word ordained. In fact, I believe one of the English translations even uses ordained. He should stay in whatever area the Lord has ordained for him. Condition, circumstances, calling, wherever the Lord has called you, stay there. Just walk out wherever the Lord has you when you came to Christ.

That's the simple message here. He says, were you a bond servant? And you'll remember a bond servant was someone who had been a servant for whatever reason. It could have been because of debt or whatever. And that person made a determination at some point, my master is a good master.

He loves me. He cares for me. He respects me. So I choose to stay a servant of this person. You'll remember that in the Old Testament, this person then would be taken to the doorpost of the home and he would have his ear pierced as a sign that he had become a bond servant.

Now, this word in the Greek is doulos, right? It can be translated bond servant or slave, but the word slave doesn't do it justice because once again, a bond servant or a doulos is one who has willingly chosen to be a lifelong servant of their master. The Apostle Paul referred to himself as a doulos of Jesus Christ. He said, I am a lifelong servant of my Lord Jesus Christ. Now this could happen among men too.

And some people who were in that condition and had made that determination to become a lifelong servant now found themselves as a born again Christian. And they wondered, should I change this? Is this something that the Lord wants for me? Maybe I should get out of this arrangement that I made with the master and I should tell him that now I'm a Christian. It's not appropriate for me to be a bond servant any longer.

And so Paul says, were you a bond servant when the Lord called you? Don't be concerned about it, right? And then he goes on to say, and this is given parenthetically here in the ESV, he says, listen, if you can gain your freedom, by all means, take the opportunity. I mean, I'm not telling you to stay in a situation of servitude. If the Lord allows an opportunity for you to be free, then, you know, by all means take that, but don't worry about it.

Don't worry about the condition that you're in. Verse 22, for he who was called in the Lord as a bond servant, okay? In other words, those who came to Christ who were bond servants of men, he says, you're actually freedmen in the Lord. So you are free. You've already been set free.

It doesn't matter your outward condition. It doesn't matter your outward circumstances. When you come to Jesus Christ, you are set free because as we know in the scriptures, him whom the Son sets free is free indeed. So it doesn't matter what your outward circumstances are, inwardly, you've been set free. So don't worry about it, right?

He goes on to say, likewise, him who was free when he is called, in other words, he had no encumbrances along the lines of servitude, he says, that person is actually now a bond servant of Christ. So you can see what Paul is saying here. It doesn't matter. You belong to Jesus once you come to him, regardless of your outward circumstances, you now belong to Jesus. So live for him, right?

And that's why he says in verse 23, what he had repeated earlier in the chapter, you were bought with a price. You know, slaves and servants were bought with a price too, and but it was money, you know, or gold, or they were placed into servitude because they owed a debt. You and I, as born again Christians, have been purchased for God, and we are a do-loss. a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and he purchased us. He purchased you.

You've been purchased. You no longer belong to the enemy. You no longer belong to any man. Regardless of what your circumstances are outwardly, Jesus has set you free because he is the only one who is truly free. And so when you come under his lordship, you find, we find, freedom, right?

Isn't that interesting? Because I am a bondservant of Jesus, I am free. If I become a bondservant of men, I am enslaved. But because Jesus is free, I am now free. He has set me free, even though I refer to myself as a doulos of Jesus Christ.

Pretty cool, huh? And so he says, since you were bought with a price, verse 23 again, do not become bondservants of men, okay? So now don't get into a situation where you become a bondservant of men. You've been set free. You are a bondservant of Christ.

If you came to Christ as a bondservant of men, don't worry about trying to change it. Just live for Jesus in the situation in which you are. But don't become a slave of men, right? And so here's the conclusion, verse 24. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

Wow. I mean, the implications of this statement are very far-reaching. And I think that this is very applicable to our lives today. Once again, I want to remind you, Paul is not saying that if you came to Christ when you were living in sin, don't worry about it. Just keep living in sin.

That's not what he's saying. Again, it is assumed that through repentance, confession, and coming to Christ, the issues of whatever sinful condition you were living in have been resolved, right? So he's not saying to a couple today, for example, who were living together outside of marriage and having sexual relations, don't worry about it. Just keep living together and having sex because that's how the Lord found you. No, that's not what he's saying.

He's talking about the other external ways of living that may involve our circumstances, our race, and other things that are external to our relationship with Jesus Christ, all right? Don't worry about it. Let the Lord lead you. If you're troubled by something going on in your life, if you're troubled by some circumstance that you're living in, commit that thing to prayer. Bring it to the Lord in prayer.

Lord, is this something you want me doing? Is this something you want me to continue to do? I've talked to a lot of people over the years who have come to faith in Jesus and realized their work environment, for example, was detrimental to their walk with the Lord. Here they were, a brand new believer, doing their best to live and walk with Jesus, and they get to work and they find that the people they're working with and the way those people talk and the way those people live is just a constant temptation for them to go back and live the old life, and so they'll come to me or someone else and say, what do I do? Well, you pray about it.

You give it to the Lord. You say, Lord, in the midst of this, give me the strength to stand and to withstand the temptation, but Lord, if this is not where you would have me, if this is detrimental, if this is gonna be a problem to my walk with you, then Lord, you open doors, open doors of new opportunities so that I can get out of this situation. If this is not where you would have me, then lead me in the way that I should go, but I wanna be careful. I think we should, as Christians say, we want to be careful not to manipulate our circumstances in such a way as to make decisions on our own apart from the Lord. What does the Lord want?

He may want you to stay in a situation that is hard because he's gonna use it in your life to strengthen you and to encourage you. You don't know, you don't know, so you just need to pray about it. So we've gotten some very, very practical advice in this section of 1 Corinthians 7, and I think that these are some important things to think through and to discuss. So let's go ahead and close our time in prayer. Father, thank you again for your word.

I thank you, Father, for the wisdom that is laid out here in the scripture. Help us, Lord, to keep in mind that you are most concerned about what's going on in our hearts, inside, and what you're speaking to us and doing in us rather than all of the external things that we tend to focus so much on. So help us, Lord God, to trust in you, to rest in you, and to walk with you wherever we may find ourselves in our daily life. Be with us, we pray. Strengthen us each day, for we ask it in the authority of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen. Amen.