

Our Gospel Calling
1 Corinthians 7:17-40
(Sermon Notes)



When you interact with a young child, what is one of the first things you ask them after their name? It's probably what they want to be when they grow up. Thinking of the first day of every year of elementary school, that is likely the question that circulates classrooms after the children go around and say their names. Come to high school, and a big part of that is figuring out what you want to be when you head off to college. As we have graduation parties, that's the primary question of the graduation party, "What are your plans for next year?". I, like many children, wanted to be many things when I was younger. I wanted to be an actor, a firefighter, a police officer, and a band director just to name a few. Through various circumstances, like realizing I didn't like acting, and I was never going to be strong enough to carry people out of a fire, I came to learn that none of those careers would be a noble call for me, personally.

This raises the question of why we are so concerned with what children do when they grow up. Why are we so concerned with what they want to be when they are older, specifically when it comes to their vocation? I believe it is because we place a high value and importance on careers, and that's not wrong.

In a similar vein, we also tend to place a high priority on marriage. And just like our concern with vocations, it's not wrong to place a high value on marriage. At weddings, single siblings of the bride or groom will often get the comment, "You're next!" thrown at them. While it is not wrong to value vocation and marital status, the problems arise when we make these things into primary things in our lives. The temptation for us is to make our vocation and our marital status into primary things in our lives. While they are extremely important and should be taken seriously, it is **our gospel calling that is the primary call of our lives**. In today's passage, Paul is going to walk us through this idea, specifically in how it plays out in marriage and singleness. But the big idea behind it all, that the gospel calling is the primary call of our lives, if taken seriously, is going to play out in every area of our lives, whether that's our marriage, our singleness or our vocations.

An important note: the Bible was written for us, but not to us. The Bible is God's word for all people at all times, but we also have to remember that the Bible had an original audience. We need to understand how the original audience would have read the passage first before we apply it to our lives.

Descriptive vs. prescriptive passages. Verses 17-24 is prescriptive for us. Verses 25-40 are descriptive. Paul even clarifies this in verse 25, when he says he has no command from the Lord, but instead he gives his best judgment in the Lord.

1. What is a calling?

- a. Paul is urging the Corinthians, and he's urging us today to lead the life that God has assigned us. In fact, he states it three different times (vv. 17, 20, 24). He also says "This is my rule in all the churches." (v.17).
- b. What is/isn't calling
 - i. Maybe when we read this passage, the two places our minds go are a call to ministry or our specific job.
 - ii. My calling is to be a... fill in the blank with your job. This is too narrow. Too shortsighted. Calling is more than just a vocation.
 - iii. We can also tend to view our calling in terms of our marital status. My calling is to be a husband or a wife. Again, this is too narrow.
 - iv. While having a job and having a spouse are good things, they are not the primary thing. They are not to be taken lightly, but they are also not to be taken as primary in our lives.
 - v. Calling is something that we can engage with no matter our life's circumstances.
- c. Calling - central part of our lives, gives us purpose and meaning
 - i. "Has called" (keklēken) is in the perfect tense. It highlights a past action with implications for the present. You were called in the past, but right now, no matter the circumstances in the present, you are called. The implications of your calling is that it affects your life right now.
 - ii. If we make our calling into just what we do vocationally, or our marital status, that leads to some problems.
 - iii. What happens if you lose your job? What happens when you retire? What happens if you lose your spouse? What happens if you lose the thing you thought was your calling?
 - iv. When we treat our job as ultimate, as our one true calling in life, it becomes an idol.
 1. "An idol is anything more important to you than God. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. Anything you seek to give you what only God can give. Anything that is so central and essential to your life, that should lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living."¹
 2. Keller is not saying that losing those things will be easy. If you lose a job or a spouse, that's gut wrenching, but it shouldn't paralyze you.
- d. Why is Paul urging the Corinthians to remain in the condition they were in when they were called? Why is this important?
 - i. Paul uses two examples: circumcision and slavery
 1. The great religious and social distinctions of Paul's day - circumcised, uncircumcised, slave, free
 - ii. By trying to change these things after they were called by God, they were trying to gain acceptance from their peers by changing the externals.
 - iii. Paul is urging them not to change these external things.
 1. Circumcision and uncircumcision don't matter, what does matter? Obedience
 - iv. Where you are, what you do, (the externals) is not of first importance. Your relationship with God is what matters most and your obedience to him.
 - v. All of life belongs to God. We should serve him wherever we find ourselves.

¹ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Dutton, 2009), xvii-xviii.

- e. The gospel calling
 - i. The gospel calling is the primary calling of our lives. The gospel isn't that we change our externals to try to reach God. It isn't about climbing up to God, but it's about God coming down to us. It's about Jesus coming to the earth to live a perfect life that we could never live, and die the death that we deserved.
 - ii. This is our gospel calling. To have our life defined by this truth.
- f. Verses 25-40 - Descriptive
 - i. Paul begins this section saying he doesn't have a command, but instead he gives his judgment, or his opinion.
 - ii. "I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is."
 - 1. Present distress could mean just a general hardship as they wait for Christ's return.
 - 2. But it is likely something very specific going on in Corinth, like a famine.
 - iii. Paul is saying because of your current specific circumstance, it's better to just remain as you are, and not wish your life away.
 - 1. "When high seas are raging, it is no time for changing ships" ²
 - iv. Paul is specifically telling the Corinthians (it's not prescriptive for us) married people should remain married and single people should remain single.
 - 1. Paul is highlighting that both single and married people have their own troubles in this life.
 - 2. I think he is trying to get them out of a "grass is greener" mindset.
 - 3. He doesn't want them caught up in the anxieties of this life and their marital status.
 - 4. It is good to be single. It is good to be married. Verse 32 - I want you to be free from anxieties about it all because it's not what matters most in this life.
 - 5. Paul is giving the Corinthians this good advice not to lay any restraint upon them, but to promote good order (v.35).
- g. Marriage and singleness
 - i. What I think Paul wants us to grasp goes back to the idea of calling and leading the life that God has called us to. Through it all, ultimately our main calling is to lead the life God has called us to. He's called us to the specific life because he is good.
 - 1. Paige Benton Brown is a teacher in Nashville, and in an article she wrote in 1998 when she was single, longing for a husband, she says this: "I long to be married. My younger sister got married two months ago. She now has an adoring husband, a beautiful home, a whirlpool bathtub, and all-new Corningware. Is God being any less good to me than he is to her? The answer is a resounding NO. God will not be less good to me because God cannot be less good to me. It is a cosmic impossibility for God to shortchange any of his children." ³
 - ii. The big idea of this section - This earth is passing away. I want you to be free from anxieties about your status here on earth. Remember your gospel calling. Don't get caught up in the trappings of this world that you miss the point.

² Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 115.

³ Paige Benton, "Singled Out," *PCPC Witness*, February 1998, reprinted by permission, *Re-generation Quarterly*, accessed October 13, 2025, PDF file, <http://static.pcpc.org/articles/singles/singledout.pdf>

- iii. For a more in depth look, refer to Pastor Kyle's blog post from Friday (also on the website).
 - 1. "At the heart of Paul's instructions is the invitation to follow Jesus in a courageous and life-defining way with our sexuality and in our marriages or singleness. Glorifying God is the goal of the Christian life, so let us glorify God with our bodies".⁴

2. What is the primary purpose of our lives?

- a. The Westminster Catechism puts it this way – "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever."⁵
- b. The primary purpose of a believer is to give God glory.
 - i. Paul is applying this truth to both marriage and singleness in this passage.
 - 1. Are you single? Live in a way that glorifies God.
 - 2. Are you married? Live in a way that glorifies God.
 - 3. Are you engaged? Live in a way that glorifies God.
 - ii. 25-40 is descriptive of specific stations of life. Married, unmarried, betrothed. The prescription for us, however, is to live in a way that glorifies God.
 - iii. Live the life that the Lord has assigned to him (vv. 17, 20, 24).
 - iv. He is reminding us that the most important thing about us is not our marital status, but our identity in Christ.
- c. The calling for all believers is simple: The Great Commission
 - i. In Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 28:16-20), Matthew highlights Jesus' final words before he ascends into heaven.
 - ii. Jesus calls us to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that he has commanded.
 - iii. "Go" (poreuthentes) - A possible better translation would be "as you are going".
 - 1. It's not about packing up and moving across the globe. It's not about going to a specific job, or all of us pursuing vocational ministry.
 - 2. As you are going throughout your day to day lives, in the everyday places and spaces that you find yourself in. As you are living in your supplemental vocation, are you seeking to make disciples?
 - iv. The call is clear for us as believers. There should be no waffling on whether we're called to this or not. We are. This is a call for all believers. This is the gospel call.
 - v. "An individual's fundamental identity calling (salvation by grace) shapes one's supplemental vocational calling (work in the world). It is never the other way around."⁶
- d. Purposeful responsiveness
 - i. The way you'll hear it around here is seeking and seizing the opportunities God provides each day. Seeking everyday opportunities that God provides is what it looks like to live in the gospel calling.

⁴ Pastor Kyle's blog: <https://ccames.org/2025/10/what-does-the-bible-say-about-marriage-and-divorce/>

⁵ The Westminster Assembly, The Westminster Shorter Catechism (Edinburgh: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2000), Q. 1.

⁶ Stephen T. Um, 1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross, Preaching the Word series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), kindle.

- ii. There isn't a status we first must achieve, or a type of person we must become before God can use us. That's the point of the gospel calling being primary. It's your identity in Christ as a child of God that is of first importance.
- e. Christians are bi-vocational
 - i. We are first called through the Gospel to faith in Christ. Then, we are called to a specific station or place in life.
 - ii. It is in this second calling of our specific station of life that we can live out our identity that we have from our first calling.
 - iii. The gospel changes our lives, then spurs us to show and share that with others. This is what God has called us to do. Our primary calling is the gospel call in our lives.
 - iv. It's going to practically play out differently in each of our lives, and Paul touches on that as we saw in vv. 25-40 specifically with married and unmarried people.

3. How does our gospel call actually play out in our lives?

a. The gospel call keeps us from idolatry

- i. The Gospel is the lens in which we can view the world. It helps us to put things in their right places in our lives.
- ii. An idol is something that absorbs your heart and your imagination more than God. This week, pay attention to what consumes your thoughts. Specifically when it comes to things like your singleness, your marriage, or your job.
- iii. The way out of idolatry is repentance. Turning from sin, and turning to God. God is good to us, because he can't be anything but good to us. You are in your life station, you are in your job, you are in your marriage because God is good.
- iv. When we get this twisted, we've fallen into idolatry. The gospel call, which is primary in our lives, keeps us from this idolatry.
- v. What consumes your thoughts?

b. The gospel call keeps us grounded in our expectations

- i. When our lives are correctly ordered, and our loves are rightly ordered, we begin to have right sized expectations for our lives and for this world.
- ii. I've said it before, but we live in the already, but not yet. Already Jesus has come to the earth, already Jesus has died and rose again, already we've been called. But Jesus has not yet returned and not yet made everything new again.
- iii. The reality of the here and now being the already but not yet helps us see that we still live in a broken world. Sin plagues the lives of married people. Sin plagues the lives of single people. Yet, we know that Christ will return and make all things new again.
- iv. We can live grounded in our expectations, because we know our marital status is not the end all be all. It is not the most primary thing in this life. Living a life in our gospel calling that glorifies God is what matters most.
- v. What do you think you deserve?

c. The gospel call keeps us focused on the primary things

- i. The gospel keeps us focused on the world around us the way God wants us to see it. Instead of getting caught up in all the anxieties of this life, whether single or married, the gospel helps us to be about what God is about.

- ii. God is not concerned with our happiness as much as he's concerned with our holiness. Our holiness must come first in our lives, not our happiness. There are many ways that God transforms us more and more like Christ every day by his Spirit. One of those ways is either through our marriage or our singleness.
 - iii. As you take stock of your life, are you more concerned with your happiness in this life or your holiness? Are you more concerned with how you can glorify God through the way you live your life, or are you more concerned with staying on track with the plan that you made for your life?
 - iv. The gospel helps us to stay focused on the primary things of our gospel calling and ultimately our holiness.
 - v. Are you more concerned about your happiness or your holiness?
- d. So how does 1 Corinthians 7 change your Monday?
 - i. Are you single? Glorify God. Are you married? Glorify God. Are you engaged? Glorify God.
 - ii. The primary calling for each of our lives is to honor and glorify God with our lives and with how we go about living in this world. **Our gospel calling is the primary call of our lives.** Everything else falls behind that.