

Live as you are called.

1 Corinthians (CGS#14) – 7:16-40

INTRODUCTION: In chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians, Paul has been answering the Corinthians' questions about marriage and divorce. But Paul is also taking the opportunity to remind them of the immense freedom that they have in Christ, and the essential call for all believers. Theologian Andrew Wilson provides a very helpful explanation of this section.

"The central section of the chapter provides a rationale both for what comes before it (instructions on divorce and remarriage) and for what comes after it (those who are currently unmarried). The key principle is obviously important to Paul because he states it three times in only eight verses, with only slight variations: "Each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches" (v 17; see also v 20, 24). At face value, that looks like a statement that a person's situation in life should not change from the moment they become a Christian. Is Paul saying that Christians should not change jobs? Get married? Accept promotions? Move house? Some commentators have taken it this way, on the basis that Paul expected the return of Christ at any moment (v 29–31). But there are two reasons to suggest that he is doing something subtler than that.

The first is Paul's own story. Clearly, the transformation in Paul's life when he met the risen Christ was not simply "spiritual" but related to his physical situation and his circumstances. His work, if we can call it that, completely changed. So did his relationships. So did his physical location. It would be very strange if Paul, of all people, were to teach that conversion should make no difference to what we do and where we do it. The second is found in the examples he gives by way of explanation. Take circumcision (v 18–20): nobody who is uncircumcised should get circumcised, and nobody who is circumcised should try to reverse it. Paul starts with that example partly because the Corinthians would presumably have thought it was obvious, even if Jewish church members might have been taken aback by the stark announcement that "circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing" (v 19). But if we know Paul, and particularly his letter to the Galatians, we also know that circumcision is his go-to example of how human beings pursue righteousness in the sight of God and others. So by using circumcision as his example here, Paul is highlighting the fact that none of the things we do—getting married, staying single, getting circumcised, staying uncircumcised—add anything to our standing before God. In that sense, they are "nothing". So if you are getting married or staying unmarried for that reason, forget it. Marriage is nothing and singleness is nothing; "Keeping God's commands is what counts".¹

See, what Paul ultimately does in this section is to remind the Corinthian believers of their gospel call. It is not marriage or singleness or circumcision that defines them any longer. It is that they are under Christ, bought with a price, and are to glorify Christ in all that they do. That is their life's calling now and every day moving forward. There is much room to make godly decisions about the rest, but they are called to declare the gospel in word and deed. Or, as Jesus put it, make disciples of all nations... you know, the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). So when we think of our lives, our passions, and our calling, we are to be reminded that **our gospel calling is the primary call of our lives.**

GETTING STARTED – As you begin your group time, take time to answer this question together: What is the primary calling or purpose of your life?

¹ Andrew Wilson, *1 Corinthians for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2021), 81–83.

IN THE WORD – Let's dig back into the passage. It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday-Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

Note: Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions about the article of faith we are studying that week.

1. What did you hear God's Spirit say to you through the passage this week? How does it encourage you? How does it sharpen you?
2. How have you seen God at work in your life this week? Have you enjoyed him? Have you heard his voice and the leading of his Spirit? Big ways or small ways.
3. In what ways does this chapter challenge your pre-existing views about marriage and singleness? What will you say, pray, or do differently as a result?
4. If your primary call is to declare the gospel (via word and deed), how does that inform and shape these relational spheres? Be as specific as possible, and remember we are all works in progress.
 - a. **Your family** – How do you interact with your spouse, parents, kids, and extended family that declares the gospel in word and deed?
 - b. **Your co-workers** – How do you interact with your co-workers that declares the gospel in word and deed?
 - c. **Your neighbors** - How do you interact with your neighbors that declares the gospel in word and deed?
5. Considering those relational spheres, what is one intentional step of growth to be more gospel focused in each of those three areas? Consider – Attitudes, words, and a commitment to honoring each other.