

***NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE OR WHAT YOU ARE,  
THERE BE A CHRIST FOLLOWER***  
**1 Corinthians 7:17-24**

**(Read 1 Corinthians 7:17-24)**

**INTRO:** When I was a young teen, which is now a half century ago, I received from someone, somewhere a little chorus book with something like “WORSHIP NOW” on the simple orange cover. It had something new, at least to me in its pages, something that became Christian Contemporary music. The only song in that little book that I remember was a folksy song (though at the time I thought it was dangerously close to rock ‘n roll) and it was entitled “They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love”. It had only 4 short stanzas that were powerful in their simplicity, and each ended with *And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

Do people know you are a Christian just by being around you? Do they hear your words and know you are a Christian, even if you don't say a word about being one? Do people who come in contact with ABCers know we are Christians by our love?

These are pertinent questions for these days when people love taking potshots at Christians. There is a real perception on the part of people who don't know any Christ Followers, or if they do, the ones they know bear little resemblance to the Name they bear, that Christians are closed minded, restrictive, and angry people. In other words, they have a wrong impression about who and what Christ Followers are. It's true that Christians are often maligned by people who refuse to understand what it's about. It's also true that Christianity has been given a bad name those who misrepresent the faith.

There is nothing new with this struggle. Paul's message to the Christ Followers in Corinth as they fretted about being Christians in a very contrary culture was, “*No matter where you are or what you are, there be a Christ follower.*” No matter where you are, and what you are and who you are, people need to look at you and know you are a Christ Follower.

Last week we looked at the opening verses of Chapter 7 where Paul was giving marriage advice to new believers in a pretty messed up culture. In a lot of ways they were learning holiness from the ground up as Paul is addresses topics that, in his own Jewish culture was cut ‘n dried and pretty healthy, but for the Corinthians almost a foreign language. Paul is struggling too, because, in some ways, he is formulating, with the Holy Spirit's direction, a theology of relationship.

A quick aside: In our discussion last week I addressed Paul's words to people who were married to spouses who made no profession of faith. His instruction was to stay with the person as long as they allowed. That is, being different from your spouse because of faith is not a reason for separation or divorce. In fact, Paul says staying with that person is a very good way to witness to the power of the Gospel. I didn't address it there, because, for one thing, it is not mentioned by Paul, but this past week the question came to me “What about the marriage that is characterized by abuse?” My answer to that cannot be answered fairly here, but my firm belief is that abuse of any kind endangers the marriage vows (that is, sacred promises made to **not** be broken). Abuse, whether it's physical, sexual, verbal, or psychological, threatens to break the marriage covenant, especially the part characterized by the words to *love and to cherish* one another. My counsel on this topic has been abused in itself when I have advised couples in abusive situations so I am very careful to say that an abused spouse should not remain in an abusive situation even to the point that, if the abuser persists, the offended spouse should not remain in an abusive marriage. I can discuss this further with any of you, but that is a short answer to an extremely complex and difficult issue.

Now, back to our text, since it reflects well on what I just said. Paul says, very clearly . . .

**Be Christian where you are**

- In just about any situation a Corinthian or Ashlandian finds him or herself in, be a Christian where you are. If you are a slave – be a Christian slave. If you are spouse married to a pagan Corinthian spouse, be a Christian spouse. If you are a sailor, be a Christian sailor. No matter what situation you were in when you accepted Christ as your Savior and Lord, there, you should be a Christian.

- Now, someone might just go back to Chapter 6 and recall that one of the issues facing the Corinthian church was the practice of engaging sexually with temple prostitutes. And they might just ask me, what if one of those temple prostitutes accepted Christ? And I'm sure many of them did. Was Paul telling them to be a Christian temple prostitute? And my answer, though I might be a bit snarky as I said it, would be, **NOPE!** But the question is a good one because it illustrates the kinds of issues Paul was dealing with in the area of Christian freedom.
- Nevertheless, ABC, whatever you are, be the best one you can be, because that is where the Lord has called you for the mission that he has just for you. You are uniquely qualified for what God has called you to be.
- And besides . . .

### **The really important thing is obeying God's call and commands**

- The Corinthian Church, as I've pointed out before, was mainly characterized by converts from the lower social classes of society, with a few from the professional and richer classes. Apparently, there was enough concern about a lack of upward social progress that Paul felt the need to address the issue. Paul does it by pointing out that what counts is not sociological conditions but keeping God's commands. Gordon Fee put it this way, "*Do not let your social condition be a concern for you. Your calling in Christ eclipses such conditions, but thereby also transforms them into situations where you may live out your Christian calling.*" In other words, bloom where you are planted.
- Apparently, some have seen this teaching as a works salvation – where a person is attempting to win favor with God by their good works and behavior rather than by accepting his grace by faith alone. The answer to that is it is not a works salvation, just a life that is marked by one's salvation. Live out your faith in front of people and be who God has transformed to be – a living picture of Christ.
- This is good for us to hear. We live in a society of comparisons. We need to keep up with the Joneses. We have to have a bigger house, and a greener yard, and newer car, and a smarter kid than anyone else. We want to be able to sing with Toby Keith, "*How do you like me now?*". Paul tells us to relax and obey. Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. If we try anything else, we will not be happy.
- Just keep God's commands. (v. 19). Besides . . .

### **Christ made distinctions obsolete**

- This will keep you from wasting time on climbing into a place you don't belong. God loves us as we are and where we are. Gordon Fee points out that, "*Status of any kind is ultimately irrelevant to God.*"
- The issues circumcision and slavery were the issues Paul specifically addresses. The Jewish act of circumcision, which was a mark of belonging to God's chosen people, was rendered obsolete by Christ's sacrifice. God's chosen was anyone who had surrendered to the Lordship of Christ – Jews or Gentile. So, if you were circumcised, stay circumcised, if you were not, stay that way. Remain as you were when God called you. (v. 20). The other issue was slavery which was hugely different from the slavery our nation practiced. Nevertheless, it was not something to be sought after and, of course, it was better to be a free person. Again, Paul tells slaves to remain as you were when God called you, though, if you can buy yourself free, do it.
- The point is, neither slavery nor freedom counts for anything to the one who is called into fellowship with Christ. Fellowship with Christ is what matters, and what brings true freedom and identification with Christ. Distinctions do not matter to Jesus.
- Barclay puts it this way, "*Race and marks of race make no difference. What did make a difference is the kind of life you live.*" That takes us full circle back to where we began . . .

### **Conclusion: No matter where you are or what you are, there be a Christ follower**

All that matters is how God views us. And do you know how he views us? We are his loved and coveted children. Even those of us who feel we are unworthy of love and deliverance, he loves us anyway, and wants us to serve him where we are.

We are his. I think it was Gordon Fee who "Our calling has eliminated the option of belonging to ourselves. We belong to Christ" We belong to no one else. No one else calls the shots. He says bloom where you're planted. Be a Christ Follower where you are because of whose you are. Amen.