

“Concerning” Marriage:

“So Let Him Walk”

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

Although this is a continuation of the previous text on marriage (part of the same paragraph, according to some Greek scholars), this can be seen as a type of parenthetical or, at the very least, a text that steps outside of a specific context or issue and can be broadly applied. “The apostle here introduces a new subject; or an inquiry varying somewhat from that preceding, though of the same general nature. He had discussed the question whether a husband and wife ought to be separated on account of a difference in religion. He now says that the general principle there stated ought to rule everywhere; that people who become Christians ought not to seek to change their condition or calling in life, but to remain in that situation in which they were when they became Christians, and show the excellence of their religion in that particular calling. The object of Paul, therefore, is to preserve order, industry, faithfulness in the relations of life, and to show that Christianity does not design to break up the relations of social and domestic contact.”

Each of these areas are critically important to the life of the church. If marital status (whether married or single) is right in relation to Scripture and the Lord, then the church will be the better for it. If our walk with the Lord is right in the church we are in, in our “religious” life, then the ministry of the Lord and the cause of the gospel will be unhindered by the “politics” of religion. If the believer will consider his

position in the workplace, whether a simple laborer or management, as a place they can use to demonstrate Christ to those around them, and be a testimony even in the more difficult of circumstances, then the home and the church and even the nation will benefit and be blessed."

So, for those that say their marriage and their home life is none of the church's concern and will have no affect on anything else either is greatly misled or simply choosing to do whatever they want without any regard of the consequences.

I. WALK RIGHT IN "EVERYTHING" – VS. 17

A. This is the broad rule – the basic principle that is to guide the believer through life in every area (those spoken of in this text – marriage, church, work). This is something that the Apostle Paul taught in all the churches in which he had an influence.

B. Encompassed within this verse is the issue of marriage, considering the greater context. God called us to be faithful and walk with Him, no matter the status of our marriage – either single or married to a non-believer or married to a believer. Whatever the status of our relationship, we are to "walk" right with God.

C. "But" – what follows is contrasted with what preceded, as well as steps outside that particular context to present a broader principle.

1. This particular English word translated “but” is from two Greek words - εἰ, if; and μή, not. Often translated “save,” “except” in addition to “but.”
2. “But” – “only be careful not to make this a ground for yourselves causing the separation (Alford).
3. “But” – “only – Paul gives a general principle as a limitation to what he has just said in verse 15” (Robertson).
4. “But” – “literally, if not. The phrase introduces a caution (Pulpit Commentary).

D. “As God hath distributed to every man”

1. It is God that does the giving, the gifting, as He sees fit. We are to simply trust Him to give us whatever we need to accomplish His will in our lives.

Matthew 19:12

12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

1 Peter 4:10–11

10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him

do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

2. "Hath distributed"

a) Aorist, active, infinitive – points to a particular time (in this case, in the past), and establishes a thing as factual or true. God, at the point of salvation, gifted us with what we needed to do His will. Within that gifting, within the context of 1 Cor. 7, if one was married when they got saved, they were to work to stay that way; if they were single, they were not to work to change that status unless God directed.

b) "Distributed"

(1) The word for "distributed" is translated in other versions as "given" (BBE), "assigned" (ESV, NIV, NASB, and others), "placed" (NLT), etc.

(2) The word means to divide, to part, to share; to separate into parts. A good way to understand its meaning is in the word "apportioned."

(3) We have not all been given equal parts – whether it be in marriage, or in our lives in the church, or in life generally. We have been given differing abilities and gifts for the sake of the cause of Christ (a truth we will consider in greater length later in our study of First Corinthians).

Romans 12:3–8

³ For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

⁴ For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

⁵ So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

⁷ Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

⁸ Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

3. "To every man" – not gender specific – this is the same Greek word translated "every one" in the next clause.

E. "As the Lord hath called every one"

1. There are differing opinions on this clause.
 - a) Some keep it in the strict context of chapter seven – marriage. If we are called to be married, stay that way; if we are called to

be single, stay that way. This does not fit what follows, nor does it fit the overall view of what the Holy Spirit is teaching.

- b) Some consider the calling here to be that of salvation (and that is part of it but not all of it).
- c) The best understanding, within the context of the passage, as well as fitting within the context of Scripture as a whole, this clause relates to the next – “so let him walk.” We are called by God, in salvation, to walk as a believer should – we are predestined “to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29).

“Calling’ here must not be regarded in the modern sense of profession or condition of life; it is nowhere so used in the New Testament, but always signifies God calling to us (see Rom. 11:29; Eph. 1:18). Continue to be Christians of the kind which God’s call to Christianity made you. If you were circumcised, and so God’s call into the Christian Church made you a circumcised Christian, continue so; don’t do anything which would seem to imply, that some other change in addition to your call was necessary to complete your admission to the Church.” Understanding the “calling” here, as I do, to be personal religion, or Christliness, which is elsewhere called the “heavenly calling,” Paul’s advice to abide in that state, in whatever relationship or condition we are found, is intelligible and right. (Pulpit commentary)

Romans 11:29

²⁹ For the gifts and calling of God are

without repentance.

Ephesians 1:18

¹⁸ The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

2. Again, we see it is the Lord that does the calling. Notice the change from “God” to “Lord.” This is not just for readability – He is not only our God, in the general sense, putting the call on us, gifting us; He is our “Lord” – our Master, the One to whom we are accountable.
3. “Every one” – no matter who we are: male or female, young or old, Jew or Gentile, bond or free – we are called to walk with the Lord.

Galatians 3:26–29

²⁶ For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

²⁷ For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

²⁹ And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

F. “So let him walk”

1. The NIV reads, “should live as a believer”

– this gives a good understanding of the clause. The ESV reads, “lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him” – another good rendering.

2. “So” – in that state, without change (Alford)

3. “Let him walk”

a) All one word in the Greek (περιπατέω) – a word that is made up of two parts: the first (περι), which means through, all over, around; and the second (πατέω), meaning to trample or tread. Together, literally they mean to tread all around, to walk at large (especially as proof of ability); figuratively to live, deport oneself... (Strong).

b) This could be seen as “to be at large, to be obvious” – our Christian walk is to be out in the open where it can be seen and judged as to whether it is “worthy” of the name of Christ.

[Ephesians 4:1–3](#)

¹ I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

² With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

³ Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[1 Thessalonians 4:1](#)

¹ Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord

Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

1 Thessalonians 4:11–12

¹¹ And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

¹² That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

- c) As it says in Ephesians 4:1, the believer is to “walk worthy” – the “everything” principle taught in this verse in First Corinthians is summed up in that clause – we are to walk worthy, deserving, of the name “Christian,” and the church, as a whole, representing Christ on earth, is also to “walk worthy” of the calling to be a church.

Examples of those that walked “worthy” in Scripture:

(1) *Enoch – Gen. 5:24*

Genesis 5:24

²⁴ And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

(2) *Abraham – Gen. 17:1*

Genesis 17:1

¹ And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

(3) The early church members – Acts 9:31

Acts 9:31

31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

(4) Paul and Timothy – Phil. 3:17-21

Philippians 3:17-18

17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

Conclusion: Where are you in your walk with the Lord? Have you abandoned your walk for the sake of the world, or for the sake of pleasing others?

Christians are not differentiated from other people by country, language or customs; you see, they do not live in cities of their own, or speak some strange dialect, or have some peculiar lifestyle.

This teaching of theirs has not been contrived by the invention and speculation of inquisitive men; nor are they propagating mere human teaching as some people do. They live in both Greek and foreign cities, wherever chance has put them. They follow local customs in clothing, food and the other

aspects of life. But at the same time, they demonstrate to us the wonderful and certainly unusual form of their own citizenship.

They live in their own native lands, but as aliens; as citizens, they share all things with others; but like aliens, suffer all things. Every foreign country is to them as their native country, and every native land as a foreign country.

They marry and have children just like every one else; but they do not kill unwanted babies. They offer a shared table, but not a shared bed. They are at present "in the flesh" but they do not live "according to the flesh". They are passing their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the appointed laws, and go beyond the laws in their own lives.

They love every one, but are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and gain life. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of all things. They are dishonored and yet gain glory through dishonor.

Their names are blackened and yet they are cleared. They are mocked and bless in return. They are treated outrageously and behave respectfully to others. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; when punished, they rejoice as if being given new life. They are attacked by Jews as aliens, and are persecuted by Greeks; yet those who hate them cannot give any Reason for their hostility.

To put it simply -- the soul is to the body as Christians are to

the world. The soul is spread through all parts of the body and Christians through all the cities of the world. The soul is in the body but is not of the body; Christians are in the world but not of the world.

– From an anonymous letter to Diognetus, possibly dating from the second century.

II. WALK RIGHT ECCLESIASTICALLY – VS. 18-20

A. What is in view in these verses, within the context of the letter to the Corinthians is one of Jew and Gentile ("circumcision" and "uncircumcision"). If a person in Corinth came to Christ as a Jew it was not necessary for them to seek to undo their Jewish bond and heritage – they could still serve the Lord in that relationship (circumcision held no legal bond any longer). If they came to Christ as a Gentile, it was not necessary they become circumcised in order to be right with God (that was for a specific time period).

1. "The Jews, after their conversion, were to continue Jews, if they would. Christianity required no change in these outward things. Paul circumcised Timothy, and used Jewish customs. It was not the duty of a Christian to overthrow the Jewish system, but to throw into it a Christian feeling. Let us apply this to modern duties. The great desire among men now appears to be to alter, and so have perfect institutions, as if they would make perfect men. Mark the difference between this feeling and that of the apostle (verse 20). No man will get true rest for his soul in these days of controversy, until he has learned the significance of these wise words." (Biblical Illustrator)
2. A sect of Judaism called the "Judaizers" were following Paul from place to place sowing discord among the churches, requiring circumcision as essential to salvation.
3. Acts 15 describes the first church council where this issue was addressed and settled – so Paul is addressing that here in relation to a believer's walk with the Lord. Circumcision never did save anyone – it was given to Abraham (and his seed) to show they were different than those around them – that God had separated them unto Himself. That no longer is necessary since our walk with the Lord is demonstrated by our keeping all the commandments of the Lord – not just one.

Acts 15:24

²⁴ Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

Acts 15:28–29

²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

²⁹ That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

B. Applied in a broader way for the believer today - when it comes to a right standing with God, and specifically, when it comes to the church and our position in the world, keeping rituals (in our text, circumcision or uncircumcision) has no value to biblical spiritualism – the only thing of real value in our relationship with the Lord is “keeping of the commandments of God.”

C. The church one attends is important as to the truth and doctrine that is being taught from the Word of God. If it isn't in line with Scripture, the church needs to be abandoned for one that is. This text does not refute that principle. What this does do, however, is show that if a church is doctrinally sound and biblically based and teaches the truth in love, then

the things they do that others do not is not relevant to anything other than personal conviction – what matters is obedience.

D. There are two other verses (both in Galatians) that are relevant to this text – they act as commentary to this passage. There is a progression in these three texts:

Galatians 5:1

¹ Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Galatians 5:6

⁶ For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Galatians 6:14–15

¹⁴ But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

¹⁵ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

1. Ecclesiastical position has no value if there is no “faith which worketh by love.” Being brought up in church, being baptized as a baby, going through any catechism classes – none of that has any value if there is no saving faith.

The faith that saves is a faith, then, that produces works of love toward God, and

toward others. A faith that does not produce any change in a person, that does not produce love in a person, is a meaningless faith, a powerless faith.

James 2:17

¹⁷ Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

“Faith in Christ reveals itself to be true and genuine by a sincere love to God and our neighbor. If they had this, it mattered not whether they were circumcised or uncircumcised, but without it nothing else would stand them in any stead...Faith where it is true is a working grace. It works by love, love to God and to our brethren.” (Matthew Henry Study Bible)

2. That “faith which worketh by love” demonstrates that we are a “new creature” (Gal. 6:15). If there is no faith, there is no new creation. Our position in church means nothing if there is no true biblical conversion.

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

3. That faith that results in a new creation is then outwardly expressed in a believer’s right walk both in their personal life as well as in the corporate church body (the text of 1 Cor. 7), seen in their keeping of “the commandments of God.”

Romans 2:28–29

²⁸ For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

²⁹ But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

E. Too many times the church has gone down a path that leads away from the Word of God, and specifically, His commandments (those that are still applicable today).

There is a passage in the Gospels where Jesus was teaching on this very topic. It happened close to the end of His earthly ministry and was something very important for the Apostles, and, as will be seen, very important for us today as well.

John 14:15

¹⁵ If ye love me, keep my commandments.

John 14:21

²¹ He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

John 14:23–24

²³ Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

NOTE: These notes are from a message I preached here in July of 2016 from the passage in John, but it bears repeating at this point for the context of First Corinthians.

1. "If" – conditional word – indicates that they could actually not love Him
2. Our love is demonstrated by our obedience – if we don't obey it would indicate we don't love
3. We ought to be glad that God's love for us is unconditional
4. Three times in this passage the point is made by Jesus that love is proven by keeping His commands, His words
 - a) Vs. 15 – we show our love for the Lord by keeping his commandments – the word "keep" means to keep an eye on, to guard – comes from a word often used for the warden or guard of a prison – we are to be ever-vigilant of the commandments of the Word of God
 - b) Vs. 21 goes a bit further – Jesus tells them that "he that hath my commandments" – that is, they aren't just a head knowledge, but they are written upon the heart
 - c) Vs. 23-24 goes even further – Jesus simply states that if we truly love Him, we "will keep" His words

5. There's a very similar verse in 1 John 5:3 that needs to be seen here – it will help us understand this verse a little better
- a) "This" – refers to what's to follow, namely, "that we keep his commandments"
 - b) "Is the love of God" – not the love God has for us but the love we have for Him
 - c) "That we keep his commandments" – not only the commandments regarding love as mentioned earlier in this passage, but all the commandments that are found in the Bible that apply to us (not all of them apply to the church-age saints)
 - d) "His commandments are not grievous" – hard to be borne, oppressive – refers to the principle that His laws, His commandments are not unreasonable, the duties which they require of us are not beyond our abilities to bear

Psalm 19:7-11

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is thy servant

warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

Proverbs 3:13–17

13 Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

16 Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

Matthew 11:28–30

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Conclusion to this point: How are we at “the keeping of the commandments of God?” Does our walk in Christ show that we are a Christian? Does our desire to keep His commandments determine where we will serve Him corporately in church or are you here because of tradition or convenience? A critically important thing, when it comes to our walk with the Lord as part of the body of Christ is that we keep His commandments – that we walk holy with and in Him.

III. WALK RIGHT IN EMPLOYMENT – VS. 21-24