

# Abiding in Our Calling

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 7:10-24  
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Our Scripture reading for tonight is 1 Corinthians beginning at verse 10. 1 Corinthians 7:10 through verse 24.

10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: 11 But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. 12 But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. 13 And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. 15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. 16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? 17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. 18 Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. 20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. 21 Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. 22 For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. 23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. 24 Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

I guess I'm just too eager to have fellowship hour and didn't read my bulletin, it's next week, not this week. Thank you.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, and particularly you, boys and girls, I realize that we don't live anymore in the days of letters, hardly anyway, it's all emails, texts and so on,

but let's just say somebody did send you a letter, a handwritten letter, that would be quite something, wouldn't it? I think if you would open that letter and you would read and that person is asking you how you're doing and what's new and how things are going in school and whatever, you would want to answer that letter and maybe ask them questions like that too. Well, the last time we were together, we began a part of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church that was actually written in response to a letter that he received from them, they had questions and we considered the first of those questions last time. They had questions about marriage and relationships and things like that, we found out at the beginning of this chapter.

Well, now, tonight we're going to consider a subject that was really really important to the apostle, not that the other subjects weren't important but a subject we would call today calling. Calling. We hear about jobs, we hear about careers, we hear about work, but we don't hear so much about calling. Sometimes we hear about it with reference to ministers, you know, he's called to be a minister, but for the rest, we hardly use that word when referring to the work that we do, the life that we lead, and yet it's a very important term, it's a very scriptural one. Calling in the scriptural sense is what God wants us to do and what he wants us to be in our life.

So right now, for example, boys and girls, what is God calling you to do and to be? Well, for many of you, well, for all of you, he's calling you to be respectful obedient sons and daughters to your parents. He's also probably, many of you, calling you to be students, to study, to prepare for the rest of your life. And so that is your calling and it's the same with adults. Your dads and moms have callings whether they're in the home taking care of you, whether it's on the farm or in an office or in a factory or as a police officer, all of these things are callings. God calls us to them, he directs us to them, he equips us with the skills and the knowledge that we need for these callings, but they are callings nonetheless.

Well, he's going to talk about this tonight and that's what we want to consider with God's help, and may this part of 1 Corinthians not only be interesting, I hope, but also a blessing for our lives, that we might understand how that whatever calling we're in, we are to use that calling for the glory of God and for the good of others. Our text is that part of Scripture we read together, 1 Corinthians 7 from 10 through 40. I just want to read verse 17 again at this time.

17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.

Abiding in our calling and in this passage we have respect to marriage, with respect to status, and with respect, well, really just those two things. He's going to continue to talk about what we heard last time, singleness and marriage, but simply tonight marriage and status, our station in life.

Now if you don't have your Bible open, this would be a particularly important message to have it open because it makes it easier for me to preach if you can follow along and kind

of see where I'm going so that I don't have to always quote everything out, and you'll notice that there's important connections with verses ahead and behind the verse we'll be looking at from one moment to the next.

Last time, you will remember, we were considering the question the Corinthians raised about physical relationships between people of the opposite gender. Paul said that physical contact outside of marriage is not a good thing. He said it was a sin and that's why he encouraged husbands and wives to keep up a healthy vibrant relationship, also physical relationship, in their married life, then he was stressing the importance of this and he concluded that section, verses 8 and 9, by recommending that persons who either never married or who were married but whose spouses have died, remain if possible single, though he would give the reasons for this later on, which we'll be considering, God willing, partly now and then partly next time. Even so, Paul keeps in mind also with regard to tonight, what he wrote in verse 7 and if you look there, that being unmarried is not a gift that God gives to everybody. So being single is something that doesn't really fit everyone, so he concludes the section in verse 9 by saying it is better to marry than to burn. In other words, when we are falling repeatedly into grievous temptations and sins, particularly against the Seventh Commandment, that is a good indication not only that we need self-restraint and the grace of God to combat those sins, but also that God may be calling us indeed to marriage. Now the apostle is going to go from there to develop the idea of remaining in the calling not just in which we find ourselves, but the calling in which God called us spiritually. So if possible, if a person is married, he would say remain married. Unmarried, remain unmarried. If you're a believing Jew, don't strive to become a believing Gentile. If you're a believing Gentile, you don't need to become like a believing Jew and so on.

So first with regard to marriage. If you look back at verse 6, Paul said there that what he was writing was by permission and not by commandment. That simply means not that this was Paul's advice to take it or leave it, but it was not a command that Jesus gave in the Gospel; that this was something new, a new aspect of God's revelation. And it was not a command that everyone had to obey, but it was something that was preferable if they were able and gifted by God to do it. But then notice in verse 10 the change. He writes, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord," and then he goes on, "Let not the wife depart from her husband." So now he's not talking about, "Well, if you're gifted or if you're called in a certain way," he's saying, "This is a command. This is a must." Well, what is the "must," and is he somehow contradicting here, "Let not the wife depart from her husband," is he contradicting Jesus' own allowance when he says, "except it be for fornication," that divorce is permissible? Well, let's get into this and see something maybe we haven't thought about before.

It's going to become obvious when we get to verse 12 that right now Paul is writing to two believing spouses, two Christians who are married to each other. Later he's going to explicitly talk about a believer married to an unbeliever, but now he's talking about a believer married to a believer, "unto the married I command, yet not, but the Lord." So this is not Paul's command but the command of Christ and he's obviously referring to passages like Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:9, where Jesus is addressing divorce.

Now if we back up a second to understand the bigger context, which is actually very important, Jesus always used the Old Testament to reinforce what he taught. He would expand on what was said in the Old Testament but he would never contradict it. So for example, what is God's mind on marriage and divorce in the Old Testament? In Malachi 2, in that chapter the Lord is speaking against the people of Israel and particularly against the Old Testament priests concerning their unfaithfulness to their wives. So for example, in that chapter, verse 14, the Lord says, "the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion," and then notice these words, "and the wife of thy covenant." So God is telling us that we are dealing with a covenant relationship when we're talking about marriage. A very strong bond in scriptural terms. Then God speaks about one of his purposes for instituting marriage in the first place. He goes on to say, "And did not he, "God, "make one? And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed." So God's original purposes in marriage when he created them male and female, brought them together in marriage, was that they might fill the earth with those who would reflect his glory by living out his image, but then in a heartbreaking manner after, as it were, penciling out for us the original, then God says in Malachi, as if to bear his heart about divorce, he says in verse 16 of that chapter, "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away," putting away being the Old Testament term for divorce.

Our Lord when he confronted the Pharisees reflected the same exact sentiment as his Father. You remember the Pharisees come up to him, "Why did Moses, then, command to give a writing of divorce and to put her," that is, one's wife, "away?" Jesus' answer is strikingly similar to what God said in Malachi. He says, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives but from the beginning, it was not so." So in other words, if we understand it rightly, God is saying to us in both testaments divorce has never been something favorable in his eyes. When he made two one flesh through a marriage, and of this Jesus was speaking further, Jesus goes on to explain, "wherefore," because that was from the beginning, "they are no more twain but one flesh," and then these astonishing words, "wherefore what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

So now when we get to our chapter, we can understand perfectly well what Paul is saying. When Paul is addressing two believers, two Christians, who are married, he is not giving the option here in this passage at all for divorce, not even the exception for fornication that Jesus mentioned. How so? You'll notice if you look at this passage, the only option that he gives, Paul gives is in verse 11 of this chapter, "But and if she depart, let her remain," notice the word, "unmarried, or," and notice this, "be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife." Paul here is addressing separation without remarriage.

Now some say "depart" means divorce, but that is problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, if she is unmarried, how come it says "her husband"? If she is now single, as some assume, why is Paul saying, "be reconciled to your husband"? If you're divorced, you have no husband. More significantly, Paul does not use in this verse the word that is

consistently used in the Gospels by both the Pharisees and Jesus for divorce, for putting away, but instead he uses a different word translated "depart," and another word at the end of verse 11 simply saying "to remove; to distance one's self from." It's actually interesting that the word he's using here is the same word what Jesus used when he said, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder," in other words, separate or put apart.

Going back to verse 11, then Paul clearly is setting up a kind of a tandem in that verse and this is why it's good to look at the verse because I think you'll be totally lost if you're not looking at it. It's not that he is saying that the believing woman should not divorce her believing husband, he's saying more than that. She should not depart, he says, and in keeping that in view, he says at the end of verse 11, "and let not the husband divorce his wife." It doesn't say that. The actual word is, "let him not send her or dismiss her away."

Then notice further, Paul wouldn't say she shouldn't depart but he may not divorce, that would be confusion. What is happening here is they are to remain with each other, they should seek reconciliation as soon as possible, but under no circumstances should they marry another. Now we might ask ourselves: why would not Paul allow believers, Christians, the same exception that Jesus appears to give in those passages in Matthew? Well, Jesus was not explicitly addressing believers when he answered the Jews, he was speaking about marriage universally in general. Paul, as mentioned earlier, is talking to believers about believers. What is the difference? Well, other passages of Scripture make plain what the difference is. In 2 Peter 1:3, Peter is addressing believers. He says God's "divine power hath given unto us," believers, "all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." In other words, through the knowledge that a believer has in Christ, that saving knowledge of Christ, we have everything we need in Christ to resolve literally everything. To put it another way, when two believers divorce, that is an outright denial of the sufficiency of the Gospel. In other words, the grace of God can fix everything but our marriage. We have everything we need in Christ to respond in a godly manner to anything that happens to us. There's simply no reason, in other words, for two believers to divorce. To say so, to say it needs to happen, is to say my problem, my spouse's problems, are bigger than our God, our differences are stronger than his grace.

Furthermore, to go even a step further, in 1 John 3:15, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." Now I don't think anybody in court talks about murderers, however, we have nice names today to use when people break their marriage bonds. The most common, we have irreconcilable differences, it is said. Verse 11 is clear enough about this issue when it involves two Christians, two believers married to another. Now is Paul suggesting that two believers are always going to have it easy? No. Is he saying that there will never be disagreements? No. Is he saying that there can't be tremendous struggles, sin issues to be dealt with? To be sure, but we have access to the one who assures us that all power in heaven and in earth is given to him. Paul is saying, plain and simple, "Abide in your marriage, dear believers."

Now, if you look at verses 12 to 16, there is a distinct shift. Paul now begins to describe another situation where one of the two unbelievers has become a believer, but where the other partner is not changed. What about such a situation? Look at verse 12, "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord," in other words, now I have instruction for a situation not addressed in the Gospel exactly, but that arises now that the Gospel is going out to the nations. We know throughout the Acts of the apostles and church history, not everybody is saved. Some are changed and it can be that a spouse is not. What of that situation? This isn't Paul's opinion, remember, it's still the word of God also for today. "If," he says, "any brother," that's our first hint, that's mean Christian, "If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she," that's the unbelieving spouse, "be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away." So the scenario is two unbelievers, the Gospel comes, the one is saved, the other is not. The saved person can say, "Oh, you know, now I'm married to an unbeliever. This is going to be really difficult to manage. I think it's better we just go our separate ways." Paul says, "No, if your unbelieving spouse is willing to live with you, stay with them. Let him not put her away." And Paul is very clear with his terms used here: brother, Christian, wife that believes not, unbeliever, and so on.

This does not mean, young people, listen up, this verse has been used by plenty of young people who say, "Oh, so it's okay to go out with an unbeliever because good things may happen. Paul says it's okay." No, no, Paul's not talking about a situation where a believer starts a relationship with an unbeliever, a non-Christian, it's one where the two of them were that way and one becomes converted, one is saved. Marriage is not a mission field and I've heard young people and sometimes young adults say, "Well, you know, I'm going out with him or her to try to win them to the Lord." Big mistake. Unscriptural. In fact, there are Scriptures that clearly speak against doing that. 2 Corinthians 6:14, you know the verse, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

So if you're not married, don't date or court somebody who is a non-Christian or is disinterested with spiritual things. That's not what Paul's talking about here. So if you want to win someone to Christ, fine, but don't turn that into a relationship as part of your witnessing approach because your emotions and your sentiments are going to get all mixed up and you may find yourself more like the unbelieving person than that person's going to be like you were. What Paul is saying is if the unbeliever is content to continue in the marriage with the believer, the believer ought not to try to leave. Now, once more, Paul does not use the standard word for divorce. He is saying don't leave, don't part, don't go asunder from your spouse.

Let's ponder this added layer that God is showing us in his mind about marriage. Even though such a marriage between someone who has been saved by God and the other not, could be very difficult and we should not underestimate it, it is very difficult because how often in such situations doesn't the believing spouse hear, "Well, I didn't marry you like that. You weren't like this when we first got married and now all these changes," and so on. It's very difficult, but God's will is that we not break the marriage bond over this. He is the Holy One, he is the one that brought the two together even as unbelievers, and he is

the one that saved the one sovereignly and not the other yet, and so Paul says, "If she be pleased to dwell with him, then continue on."

In verse 13 Paul flips the situation to make sure that everyone understands the principle applies both ways, "And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her," the believing wife, "let her not leave him." Why? This would seem to be a recipe for disaster, to be having this mixed marriage, so to speak. But then look at verse 14, weighty reasons and encouragements that the Lord gives. "For," so now the reasoning, "the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband," as in, believing husband, "else," otherwise, he's saying, "were your children unclean; but now are they holy." This verse is fascinating for a number of reasons.

First of all, notice the word "sanctified." He talks about the word "sanctified" with respect to the unbelieving spouse in this marriage. He's also using the word "holy" concerning the children of such a couple. We review by saying, okay, the word "sanctified" in the New Testament means two things: either it means morally holy as in God being holy, upright with respect to God's commandments; or it is used to mean set apart, set apart for hallowed or sacred reasons. Now, obviously, Paul isn't elaborating here but the thought is striking and we actually get a hint of Paul's meaning from 1 Peter 3:1. You'll know this verse, "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any," as in husband, "obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives." So here you have a believing wife, she's pleading with her husband to seek the Lord, he wants no part of it, he's not convinced by the word that she brings to him, but Peter says, "Your example may be used by God to win this spouse to the Lord, the consistency of your godliness, the prayer life that you have," and so on.

So the obedient, submissive, godly wife may be used of God to win the husband to Christ by her example, and boys and girls, you can remember Old Testament examples that are kind of like this. Do you remember how God blessed outwardly Laban's home because Jacob was there? Do you remember how God outwardly blessed Potiphar's house when Joseph was there? So there is this sanctifying influence that believers bring to their family. Now, obviously, Paul is not using the word "sanctified" or "holy" in the moral sense. It isn't like when there's a believing spouse in the home, that automatically turns the unbelieving spouse or children into godly people. That's not what Paul's saying, but it does say from God's perspective the presence of a believing parent, even one, has a sanctifying influence on the whole family. It sets that family apart. It is a covenant family.

I found it so interesting in 1 Timothy 4:4-5, Paul says that our ordinary food that we eat is sanctified by the word and by prayer, and I remember pausing beside that and thinking is that where we get the custom to say grace and to read Scripture with our meals because Scripture says in a certain kind of way, even our food is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. It belongs together, in other words.

And he speaks here of children, "else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." Now what he does mean is there are sanctifying influences that that believing parent at the very least is going to be praying for the spouse and praying for the children, showing an example of Christ-likeness to the spouse and to the children. That's the understanding here, this sanctifying influence upon the family, and that is a powerful argument, actually, for the New Testament sense of covenant, that believing parent brings covenant blessings bestowed by God upon the family, and that's actually very consistent with the Old Testament model as well.

Now the apostle is not presuming anything, that somehow this is going to convert people automatically or it's going to make people holy in the moral sense automatically, but what he is saying, believers have influence in the home and it's even stronger than that, that there is the blessing of the Lord that comes upon that house in ways that would not apply if one of his people were not there.

Then you come to the last two verses, verse 15, that's generated a lot of controversy in church history, "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace." Now there are not a few Christians, even conservative Christians, who say this verse gives us a second biblical ground for divorce, not between two believers but in the mixed marriage scenario. But Paul doesn't say anything about divorce. He doesn't say if the unbelieving divorce, he says simply depart, if they leave. It's the same word, actually, as verse 10 and the beginning of verse 11.

Now some people say that if you're looking at that verse, that the rest of the verse says, "Well, 'call to peace,' that means it's over. This is spiritual desertion." But Paul doesn't say anything about spiritual anything. No, I must tell you in all candidness, the Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Larger Catechism, does talk about willful desertion and cites this verse, but the question is what does "bondage" mean here, and what does "peace" mean here. The translation of the Greek word into "bondage" fits exactly right; it's something akin to slavery. So in other words, you are not compelled to chase after the unbelieving spouse who leaves; you don't have to follow them all over the earth and try to coerce them to return and exhaust yourself in doing so. You can't force them to stay. You're not in bondage. You are bound to the husband but you are not divorced. You can't force the unbelieving spouse to remain.

Then the question is what does Paul mean by the believer not being under bondage? The believer is not in bondage to remain with the unbeliever, he doesn't address the issue of remarriage in this situation, he doesn't even suggest that the marriage is dissolved, and when we come to "called us to peace," what does that have to do with what we just saw? Well, there's a question here: does "called us to peace" have to do with what we just read or what just follows? And a lot of scholarship has been exercised by good and godly men both ways, but there are two conjunctions, for those of you who are grammatically minded, translated "but" and "for," both of which tend to have us believe that "called us to peace" has to do what follows in verse 16. In other words, you are not in bondage to try to keep the unbeliever here in the home, but God has called us to peace. When you

were married at first, there was peace. He has called you to peace with himself through grace. He calls us in peace when he came with his grace, and he calls us to peace now even though our spouse refuses to stay, we may still find rest, peace, in the Lord and in his ways.

Then he goes on to say, "what knowest thou?" Actually the Greek is "to what extent, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" Now the apostle is giving reasons why you want to continue in this relationship, why that sanctifying influence may be blessed by God to the very salvation of that spouse. So even if you're not getting along, even if it's one continual battle, they want the world and sin, you want the Lord and grace, you might be used by God.

Now if he's saying in the verse before that this is a grounds for divorce, it seems awfully peculiar that he would now in the verse after double back and say, "But here's a good reason to stay." It seems Paul is saying in verses 15 and 16, "You are not in bondage if the unbeliever insists on leaving, but God has called you to his salvation while you were married to that person, and who can tell if that person might be saved by means of you?"

That actually leads us to the overriding principle of the entire passage and that is this: God calls us, and now we're talking about salvation, God calls us in the midst of our lives, he calls us when we are a husband perhaps, he intervenes in our life with his grace when we're a wife, when we're a carpenter, when we're a housekeeper. God has reasons, Paul would say, why God is calling you, saving you in that circumstance, in that setting, and God through Paul is saying abide in that calling in which God called you savingly to represent him, to serve him there among the very people that you were surrounded by when you were called, the people he guided you to providentially when he saved you. Now does that mean we can never change callings? Of course not, but a change, Paul would say to us, needs to be a new calling. Abide until called elsewhere. Abide until God makes it very plain that his field of labor for him has changed.

You can see how this is so contrary to our Western mindset. You don't like your job, you just quit. You don't like what you're doing, you just do something else. And whatever you like to do, whatever you care to do, whatever circumstances or salary comparisons dictate, you just do that. Paul would say, "No, you're in a calling. God is calling and so, therefore, you are to abide in whatever calling you are until he calls you otherwise." And Paul is actually speaking about God's ordinary way. Don't run away from your situation because it's hard. Don't abandon your marriage because it seems impossible. All believers feel an urgency, I've met so many of them, new believers, they all are called to be missionaries or ministers, they're convinced of it, but that's so typical of a new believer. You want everyone to know. Well, you don't have to abandon your present calling to do that. God calls us to use the calling right where we are, to share the good news, and that we see through the New Testament.

We transition from marriage to a more broad principle of calling, but let's sing first.

If you remember way back when when we began this series, we said the Corinthians suffered from two overriding sin issues that permeate the entire letter, the first of which was a misunderstanding and misapplication of the principle of Christian liberty. Once God frees you from bondage, there's no male nor female, there's no Jew nor Greek, there's no bond nor free, you are all one in Christ, and he took that and they ran with it in a negative way. So the sacred bonds of marriage, you're free to do what you think is best. We're going to see later in this epistle God sparing us the way we worship, anyway you think is fine, is fine, we're free, and you're going to see this one situation after another, this abuse and misunderstanding and misapplication of the liberty we actually do have in Christ. The other is an exalting of giftedness as though we had somehow arrived, and that everything that we have is not of the Lord.

And if you notice in this passage, last week, this week, he's saying, "Just a minute, when it comes to human relationships, it's God's call," and I say that with reverence. He designed us so that the physical relationship has boundaries. He gives us telltale signs when marriage is recommended, even commanded. But once you're in the calling of marriage, he is the one who designed that institution, he's the one who gives the exit doors from that institution, and he's the one that determines once you're in Christ and your spouse is in Christ, you have everything you need not just for married life but for all of life, which is why now in verse 17, the apostles segues into the broader principle and it's this, "But as God hath distributed," give out, in other words, "to every man," and then notice he rephrases it, "as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches."

Do you know why people leave their marriages quickly today? It's not because there's more sin, it's not because there's more pressures on marriage, it's because we have increasingly succumbed to the lie that we did it, that we made our marriages happen; that the man who initiated, it was him who started the ball rolling, so to speak; it was the girl who said yes. So if they're the ones who initiated and agreed, they ought to be the ones to call it quits, right? No. If we believe that God calls us to that institution, if we believe as Jesus clearly says about all marriages, not just Christian ones, what God hath joined together, man may not put asunder, then this chapter is not so surprising and what Paul says in 17 is no longer shocking.

He said God has distributed to every one of you, and me, the particular character, gifts, abilities, station in life, everything, it's all from him, and as the Lord has called everyone, so whatever calling you have even if you think you're the one who got yourself into this and worked your way up to this or whatever, however your form it in your mind, God has called you to it. He's placed you where he wants you. He's gifted you with what he gave you and Paul says as God hath distributed, as God has called, walk that way. Walk with the understanding that where you are and who you are and who you're with, is of the Lord.

Then he says, "I'm not just writing to you Corinthians, so ordain I in all churches." If we would look at our entire life and everything about it as a gift of God, if we actually believed deep down in our heart not only that we didn't deserve a thing from the Lord,

but that it's his incredibly infinitely wise mind that put all of this in motion to serve his grand purposes, I think we'd look at life and relationships very differently. In other words, everything being given by him is in service to him. None of it is to be used for us, by us. That's why calling is such a central understanding, not just concerning our employment but concerning where we live, concerning who we're married to, concerning who our children are, concerning whether the boss fires you or gives you a raise. We need to start processing things according to the primary cause of all things which is the Lord, not men.

Paul reminds them, first of all, every gift comes from God, and therefore we are to be content in following the guiding calling hand of the Lord, and he will equip us to do what he calls us to do. He will direct us in that which he calls us to do. So, young people, very practical, the question is not what do you want to be when you grow up, the question you ask yourself, the question you pray every night, "Lord, what will thou have me to do? Direct me. Teach me. Prepare me. And help me to be totally open to whatever thou would have me to do." Now we can spend a whole lot of time on how do you know, but that's for another day, but it starts with a willing heart, it starts with a servant heart, it starts with the attitude, "I am not my own but I belong to him. He has put his claim on me before I even knew he existed," and it happened right there at our birth, confirmed by the sacrament of baptism, and we need to start living that way, and even if you're sitting here as an unbeliever and saying, "Well, you know, I'm not his savingly." Never mind. Show me in the Old Testament where an Israelite can say, "Well, you know, I'm not a believing Israelite so it's okay to serve Baal, it's okay to wander off into Moab, it's okay to depart from the covenant." I'm quite sure that would have earned the wrath of God and it still does today. We are not our own.

Notice how Paul illustrates this principle in 17, "Is any man called," by God, "being circumcised?" So did God save you when you were a Jew? "Let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision?" Did God save you as a Gentile? You don't need to become like a Jew. He gives us reason for saying so in 18. It doesn't matter. Circumcision nothing. Uncircumcision nothing. What does matter? Keeping the commandments of God.

So at this point in church history, the Old Testament sign of the covenant, circumcision, was fading away, replaced, as it should be, by baptism. Paul is saying the difference between Jew and Gentile, that wall of partition he refers to in Ephesians, it's gone. Those partitions no longer exist in the Christian church. What's important to God is not your status whether you're up here or down there socioeconomically, it's obedience. So, in other words, even though a king would have a lot more responsibility to answer for, God requires of kings just the same obedience he requires of street sweepers. That caused an amazing upheaval in Europe in the Middle Ages and the later Middle Ages, that kings who were thought to have next to divine authority are actually subject to law, the law of God.

I'm very thankful that when people are sworn into important offices, it's amazing that it still is this way, they have their hand on the Bible. That's not just a tradition, that has

meaning. So no matter how important, seemingly important our office is, that hand on the Bible means, "I am still subject to the King of kings." Now whether everybody realizes that or even thinks about it, is another story, but that symbolism is still there and we're thankful for it.

That's what Paul is saying, obedience counts regardless of the state, single, married status, servant, or the one in charge. We are to take that identity that the Lord gave us and focus on living a holy life in it and the question is: is that our life? When I look out over the congregation, I don't see important and less important people, I don't see people up here on the economic ladder and people down there, I see the people of God. I see the body of Christ. I see the Head in heaven calling every one in their station and circumstances today, not what you're going to be tomorrow, not what it will lead you to 10 years from now, where we are today, who we are today, what we're dealing with today.

He says, "Abide with God," and that's verse 20, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Are you a servant?" he goes on to say, "Don't worry about that. Now if you can be free, use it. So if there's an opportunity to expand your ability to have influence in Gospel terms, have at it. Nothing wrong, however, with remaining a servant." It's a completely worldly idea that servants are lowly and the served are somehow higher. Jesus explicitly said, "I came not to be served but to serve." And who is higher than he is? So in other words, to put it as simply as I can, Paul is teaching us to think not in terms of what or where but in terms of unto whom are we living, unto whom am I doing these things, how can I use opportunities and abilities best for the furtherance of Christ's glory and the good of souls around me.

Verse 22, "he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant." A beautiful play on words. The Gospel is the great equalizer. If you are even a slave in the Roman Empire, at the bottom of the economic and authoritative column, you are free in Christ, free from your sins, free to serve him even as a servant. If you're at the top, if you're the Emperor of Rome, you're still the servant of Christ, you're still subject to King Jesus.

And then the verse of all verses, "You are bought with a price," 23, "be not ye the servants of men." Now is he saying don't work for anybody, servant-hood is out because you're a Christian? That's something the Corinthians would have said but that's not what he's saying here. You are bought, you belong to the Lord. Don't go around trying to please people, trying to climb on the backs of people to make yourself something. You are his. You serve him in whatever capacity you are.

And then 24 almost seems like a repetition but there's one addition that is priceless, "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." With God. The Corinthians were staking their identity, which preacher do you follow, how many gifts do you have, oratory, wisdom, all of that, Paul says, "Stop. We are all servants of Christ and in your calling, abide with God." Abide with God. Walk with him. Speak with him. Think upon him. Contemplate his will in your situation. Look to please him. Look to

serve him. This is, in its essence, the Christian life, the everyday sense of the term. This is the life that pleases God. This is by far the most satisfying life for ourselves. This is the life to which God is calling us tonight.

Abide with God. So in other words, it's not what you do, it's not who you are, it's not what you have or don't have, it's who you're with. Are you with God? Do you walk with God? In your messy relationship, in your dashed dreams, in your successes, are you his servant? Are you abiding with him? Do you walk with him? Let us seek not only his grace but more importantly his face, to live out our daily callings unto him and with him. Amen.