

## 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 – “Serve God There!”

Introduction: **Because the Lord has apportioned us our life circumstance, we will live the Christian life in whatever life calling we have.**

### 1) Whether Circumcised or Uncircumcised

- Remember that Corinth was an up-and-coming city. It was built on an isthmus (similar to Auckland) which meant that it brought ships and wealth through its port. For many, the average day was filled with people who wanted to advance in Roman society, and the church reflected this attitude. Pride created divisions on a variety of lines.
- One way this happened was through the division between the circumcised and uncircumcised. It was not cool to be circumcised in Corinth. Being circumcised would subject an individual to mockery, and so would prevent the individual from advancing in society. This was so serious that the Jews developed a surgical way of undoing circumcision. This was what the uncircumcised thought the circumcised should do.
- On the other hand, the Jews would not have lightly abandoned the tradition of their fathers. While they knew that baptism took the place of circumcision, no doubt they would still think that circumcision is preferable to uncircumcision. Thus they were advocating it.
- Ultimately, both of these parties are prideful attempts to declare one's own circumstances or preferences superior to another. We all have this party spirit in us. We try to feel superior by inventing rules and standards that we meet. However, instead of those divisions we seek to obey God's commandments, which will serve to break down divisions rather than create them.

### 2) Whether Slave or Free

- Secondly, Paul applies his principle to the issue of slavery in the church. There were a variety of ways that one could become a slave in the Roman Empire. You could be captured in war or kidnapped, you could be born into it, and some would willingly sell themselves into slavery.
- When we think of slavery, we often think of the atrocities committed in America and elsewhere. Roman slavery was not always like this. There was a variety of occupations that a slave might hold, they were fed, clothed and paid, and most would end up being freed at some point in their lives.
- However, to be a slave was to hold a low status, and in Corinth, this bled into the church, meaning that they were considered to be inferior there as well! The only way to be considered an equal, a worthy member of the church was to secure your freedom. However, Paul tells the slaves that they should not be concerned about their status. Why? Because they have been set free by Christ's sacrifice, from a bondage stronger than any human slavery, bondage to sin. And if Jesus has set them free, then how could the church consider them to be slaves?
- In fact, while the slave has been freed, the free man is in bondage to Christ. He has been bought, and so owes his life in service to Christ and his people. This means that the masters must sacrifice themselves for the servants, perhaps their own servants! And these free men

must consider the slaves according to how Christ judges them, rather than how the average Corinthian would.

- Ultimately Paul is showing the Corinthians that they must not divide the church simply because people have different live situations, rather they must serve God and each other wherever they are.