

1 Corinthians Series #20
"Living The Call" - 1 Cor. 7:17-24

I. INTRODUCTION

A. RR

B. The Debate

1. Christians have struggled with the question: What is the social role and responsibility of the Church?
 - a. to what extent should we be involved in promoting social, economic, and political change?
 - b. do we have a mandate from God to redeem society?
 - c. does being salt and light mean that we are to take over the positions of power and influence and bring in a Christian agenda?
2. Jesus said that He came to seek and to save the lost
3. In John 18:36, as He stood before Pilate, representing the political power of the world, Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world.
4. When Christ came the first time, He came to set up His kingdom in the hearts of men and women, not in the nations of this world
5. When He comes again, only then will the kingdoms of this world become His kingdom
6. We are to follow the example of His first coming, and to pray for the second coming
7. We too are to seek and save the lost by proclaiming and living the gospel
8. We have **no** mandate to redeem society
9. Our sole mission is spiritual regeneration, **not** social revolution
10. Our passage today speaks to this issue
 - a. while it is not a full treatment
 - b. it still contains some important principles we need to get a handle on.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 17-19

17 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.
18 Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become

uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised.

19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.

1. Context - questions about marriage
 - a. should singles marry?
 - b. should married couples divorce?
 - c. should divorced people remarry or stay single?
2. Their questions revealed something about human nature that Paul knew had to be addressed
3. So he takes the opportunity to do so right here in the middle of the sections in which he answers their questions about marriage
4. What he says is a foundational principle of the Christian life.
5. ***Bloom where you're planted!*** Be a Christian where you are.
6. Paul knew human nature
 - a. we tend to think that all we need to make life better is a change of scenery
 - b. if there can just be a change in our surroundings or our situation, then we'll be happy and we can be the kind of Christian we're supposed to be
7. But the problem is usually **within** us, not **around** us.
8. The root of most our problems is within our own hearts
9. I have known many people change their circumstances trying to get away from their problems, only to discover that their problems followed them.
 - a. bad job - attitude toward authority
 - b. bad marriage - selfishness
 - c. not **always** the case, but **more often** than not
10. They had written to ask about what was best in serving the Lord . . .
 - a. believers married to unbelievers
 - b. should they divorced so they can better serve the Lord?
 - c. Paul's answer was, "No!"
 - d. but he sees in the question itself the tendency to think that a change in one's circumstance is the answer to our problems.

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

10. live as you are called

11. This was a Principle of Christian living Paul had had to establish in many churches.
12. 8 times in 8 verses Paul speaks of God's calling.
 - a. means the call to salvation
 - b. not one's vocation or career
13. He says - in whatever station or circumstance you were in when God called you to Him, stay there & follow Him in that.

18a Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised.

14. This may seem a rather moot point for us today.
 - a. not a cultural issue for us.
 - b. besides, how can someone become "uncircumcised"
 - c. fact is - at time Paul wrote, a big problem
 - Jews practiced circumcision
 - rest of world did not
 - no big deal till you realize how important athletic competition & the gymnasium were in the Greek & Roman worlds.
 - when they competed, they did say naked.
 - it was obvious who was Jewish
 - because different = great scorn & ridicule.
 - many Jewish men were so embarrassed & wanted to fit in to the Gentile world
 - so they submitted to surgery to reverse their circumcision.
 - Roman historian Celsus gives a detailed description of this medical practice.
 - rabbinic writings from the time deplored it.
 - d. apparently some Jewish Christians were thinking that since Christ fulfilled the law, it would be better to be uncircumcised
 - e. Paul says, "Don't bother."

18b Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised.

15. Conversely, there were those Gentiles who had been saved who began to think they should submit to circumcision.
 - a. after all, wasn't it a sign of the covenant of God's blessing.
 - b. there were even some false teachers who were saying this very thing - that Gentiles had to be circumcised before they could become Christians.
 - c. Paul says again, "Don't bother"

16. The point is this: A person does not have to renounce their ethnic or racial background when becoming a Christian.
 - a. for far too long missionaries have gone to other lands to share Christ and have made the people change their cultures as well as their religion.
 - b. missionaries from England & U.S. have attempted to make tribal groups into English or Americans while also trying to make them believers.
 - from clothing & music
 - to family & social structures.
 - in some cases, even taught English rather than learn the language.
 - such shortsighted and ethno-centric attitudes need to be held up to this verse

B. Vs. 20

20 Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

1. Says it plainly!
2. Now, of course, Paul doesn't mean to say that if a person is involved in some habit of immoral occupation or circumstance they should continue to serve God then.
 - a. part of coming to faith is repentance from sin.
 - b. story of (Mickey Cohen) well known gangster
 - Billy Graham crusade
 - a Christian accountant, lawyer, doctor, electrician, nurse, secretary, fireman ...
 - why not a Christian gangster?
3. But he does mean that we are to bloom where we are planted
 - a. of course things may change
 - God may call us to something else
 - our circumstances will likely change as a normal part of life & the process of years
 - b. but we are not to agitate for change
 - c. we are not to think that we can really only live for God if we get out of our present situation
4. Time and again, people will tell me how they would like to do more for God - but they can't right now because ...
 - a. their job
 - b. their marriage
 - c. maybe so - but how are you serving God now?
5. One of the first rules of the Christian life is Be a

Christian where you are !

C. Vs. 21-23

21 Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it.

22 For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave.

1. Here was another issue that posed a great challenge in the early church = slavery
2. Bold, clear lines of distinction in society.
 - a. slave - free
 - b. wealthy - poor
 - c. men - women
3. The Church was the one place where all people met on an even level.
 - a. as Christians is one superior to another
 - b. **Gal 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
 - c. would sit side by side & worship God
4. Gave rise to a problem
 - a. slaves were getting *uppity*
 - b. they were beginning to despise their masters & slacking off from work
 - c. they were beginning to agitate for freedom as something due them because they & their masters were believers.
5. Notice what Paul says to slaves - "Live as you are called!"
 - a. though a slave -- in fact, in Christ you are free
 - b. and those who are free, are the subjects & servants of Christ.
6. There are those who would fault Paul & Bible right here because Paul doesn't roundly condemn slavery
 - a. they think if he was really just, he would have demanded that all Christian masters release their slaves right away
 - b. they fault him for other passages in which he tells Christian slaves to obey their masters and to serve them as they would if they were the Lord Himself
 - c. they think that Paul should have called for the forceful defeat of the unjust practice of slavery
 - d. they see his silence on the call for abolition as

- his tacit approval of slavery
7. This is both short-sighted and seriously wrong
 - a. it's clear from all Paul wrote that he did not approve of slavery
 - b. in fact, right here he encourages slaves to obtain their freedom if they are able to
 - c. his letter to Philemon shows he did not approve of slavery and knew that the Christian ethic would eventually replace slavery with a more just society
 8. Paul saw slavery as a social evil that was nevertheless a reality
 - a. in some places, 50% of the population were slaves
 - b. like it or not, slavery was a fixture of the world at that time
 - c. and Paul was a realist
 - d. he longed to change things but he knew that you don't change society by attacking it or by rebelling against it with social revolution
 - e. before society at large can be changed, the hearts of men and women who comprise society must be changed
 - f. there must be spiritual regeneration before there is to be social rejuvenation
 9. So Paul not only told slaves to obey their master's for the Lord's sake -- he told masters to be fair with their slaves and to treat them with justice and mercy, for God was watching
 10. Drawing from the principles of grace and mercy that Paul lays down in his letters, the modern western world eventually came to realize the inequity of slavery and banned it
 11. This brings us back to my first comments today
 - a. what is the social role and responsibility of the Church?
 - b. to follow the example of Christ
 - to seek and to save the lost
 - if we are busy with that, then society is changed because hearts are changed
 - otherwise we are reduced to the realm of power politics and trying to force others to live and think as we believe they should
 12. I am greatly concerned for the church today because

it has been largely seduced into thinking that it can turn America around by adopting a certain political platform, by writing letters, by boycotting certain companies, by listening to Rush Limbaugh, and by becoming more politically active.

- a. this movement is gaining so much influence in the Church that the media has come to call it the "Christian Right."
 - b. some people talk about "turning America back to God"
 - c. but this will not be done by passing laws and electing the right people to office
 - d. to turn America back to God we have to follow the example of our national ancestors who brought America to God in the first place
 - e. they realized a Christian nation is a nation of Christians -- no more, no less!
 - and no one yet has become a Christian by passing a law or electing some to office
 - last time a checked, God was still saving people and changing their lives by the power of the gospel
13. Christ's earthly ministry was one of seeking the lost and ministering mercy and compassion to them
- a. He did not challenge the Sanhedrin
 - b. nor did He attack Rome
 - c. in fact, the Jewish Zealots tried to get Him to join their political movement to throw off the unjust tyranny of Rome but He would not
 - d. are we not to follow Him?
14. The early church understood their calling to be acts of mercy and compassion - not power politics
- a. we have no historical records of the "Christian Right" from those first few centuries of church history
 - b. but we do know that the church managed to fill the known world in just a few decades of the death of Christ
 - c. we know that entire regions embraced the gospel and whole societies were transformed by the power of the gospel
 - d. it wasn't until the church and the state became closely allied under Constantine that real problems began - problems that really in has never recovered from
 - e. the early church realized they were called to be

salt and light

- but as salt, they were to be sprinkled out into
the world - not force fed, nor shoved
down the world's throat

- as light they were to be as a city set on a hill
that attracts the weary traveler, not a light
to be shined in the eyes and blinds

- f. so they took in abandoned children and started orphanages
 - g. they fed the hungry and clothed the poor
 - h. they started hospitals
 - i. and they did all this as the church
 - j. they didn't agitate and demand that the government do them
15. When the Church becomes aligned with a social or political movement, it stands the chance of compromising the gospel, which is its sole mandate
16. However, when the Church is faithful to its gospel mandate, lives are changed, and this change has a profound effect on society
- a. sin and evil are rooted out
 - b. not by force, but by the Spirit of God who brings sinners to repentance
17. As Citizens -- we need to let our elected representatives know our opinions on issues
18. But that is not where we put our hope
19. As Christians -- we need to be actively showing mercy and compassion to the lost, winning them to the grace and love of God
20. One more point before we move on . . .
- a. in v. 21 he writes "**Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it.** "
 - b. while the slave shouldn't be preoccupied with his freedom, if the opportunity came to be free, he should go for it
 - c. Paul recognized that we go through many changes in life
 - d. as Christians, we don't believe in chance in these matters
 - e. God is sovereign over our lives and He directs them according to His good purposes
 - we need to be sensitive to know when He is leading us to something new
 - when He is, faithfulness calls us to follow Him
21. In the ancient world, slaves could gain their freedom

- a. though most of their life was spent in the business of serving their master, they did have some free time
- b. many spent this time making and selling small items
- c. the money they collected from this work was taken to the local temple where it was deposited with the priest
- d. once the slave had made enough deposits, he or she would bring their master to the temple, where the priest would give him the money as a purchase price
- e. then, in a figurative sense, the slave became the property of the god
- f. that is the picture we have as we move on to v. 23

D. V. 23

23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

- 1. Here's the issue
- 2. We are not our own
- 3. Whether slave or free, we belong to God
 - a. Christ bought us
 - b. and the purchase price was His blood
- 4. We do not live by our own agenda, political or otherwise
- 5. We live by the agenda of the kingdom of God
 - a. and each day we come into contact with people who are lost and need the light and love of Christ
- 6. Do not become the slave of man
 - a. meaning a slave to the ways of this lost world
 - b. do not become enslaved to sin
 - c. you belong to Christ

E. V. 24

24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

- 1. 3 times now he has said this same thing
 - a. why?
 - b. because it is a truth we find hard to accept
 - c. we must bloom where we are planted!
- 2. **Phil 4:11-13** I have learned in whatever state I am, to

be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Bought

1. V. 23 - Bought at a price
2. Who do you belong to?
2. Christian belongs to Jesus
3. Because of that, assured of heaven
4. Whom do **you** belong to?
5. If yourself, you are lost

B. Christ Came For The Lost

1. And He is seeking you right now
2. Come to Him!