

The Book of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

Session 29: Paul's Illustrations

We continue our study in 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul is answering some questions which the Corinthians have asked him.

In our previous session, we saw how Paul instructed those who have become believers to continue their marriage with the unbelieving spouse, as long as the unbelievers are pleased to stay with them.

To drive this point home, Paul is going to give two illustrations; circumcision and slavery. But make no mistake, the subject matter of chapter 7 is marriage in its various aspects. Paul is not suddenly changing the subject, but illustrating his point of not changing your marital status because you got saved.

Paul's first illustration is circumcision. This is a dispensational example of being true to the program of which you are a part. This doesn't have the bearing on us today as it would have had back in the first century at Corinth because today, we only have members of the body of Christ (BoC) and the mystery program. But, when Paul wrote this, there were still "circumcision" believers left over from the "kingdom" program, and there were "uncircumcision" believers who were part of the new "grace" program.

1 Corinthians 7:17 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.

In these verses, Paul uses physical circumcision to illustrate his point about not changing our marital status when one spouse gets saved. I want to talk about this from the standpoint of circumcision, just don't lose the fact that Paul is using this to illustrate his point about marriage.

What Paul is saying is for a saint to remain in the same physical condition you are in when you are saved. During this DoGG, circumcision is nothing.

Galatians 5:6 For in Jesus Christ **neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision**; but faith which worketh by love.

When we compare 1 Corinthians 7:19 with Galatians 5:6, they both say that circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. But Galatians says the important thing is “faith which worketh by love.” Corinthians says the important thing is “keeping the commandments of God.” Is 1 Corinthians 7:19 putting us back under the law? God forbid!

Paul is not referring to the ten commandments, but to those things which our apostle has written for us, the members of the BoC. In other words, we should consider Paul’s doctrine to be “the commandments of God” as far as our obedience to them goes. In this case, “keeping the commandments of God” and “faith which worketh by love” are talking about the same thing.

Paul’s instruction for the Corinthians is this: whatever condition you are in regarding physical circumcision, there is no need to seek a change one way or the other. Circumcision is not the issue, loving obedience to the faith, following Paul’s doctrine, that is the issue.

Let me say one more thing about circumcision before we move on. Circumcision was an issue back in Israel’s program. God was unhappy with Moses for not having his son circumcised (Exodus 4:25). During God’s program with Israel, circumcision was a token of the covenant between God and His nation. It was a sign for Israel to trust in God and not their flesh. But there has been a dispensational change and Israel no longer enjoys a “favored nation” status before God.

In the DoGG, baptism and circumcision are a sign of unbelief in what God is doing today. Why is that? Because in this DoGG, our baptism and circumcision are spiritual (not physical) and they took place the moment we trusted Christ as our Savior. This is not the default thinking of most believers today. Ask them about baptism and they immediately think of water baptism.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For **by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body**, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

The spiritual baptism placed us into Christ as members of His body.

Colossians 2:10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: ¹¹ In whom also **ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands**, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: ¹² Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

This spiritual circumcision cuts our soul loose from our physical flesh so we can be free from the power of our flesh. When we sin now, it is by our choice, as we are no longer bound to our flesh.

Because these are spiritual operations which we cannot see or feel, we must be told about them and we believe them “by faith.”

So here is the application: just as we do not jump from the “circumcision” program to the “uncircumcision” program, neither should we jump into a different marital status when we get saved.

The next illustration concerns slavery.

1 Corinthians 7:20 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.

In vv. 17-19, Paul says not to change your physical circumcision, as the physical is not the issue, but obedience to Paul's doctrine.

Now we are faced with the question of whether believers should seek to change their socio-economic status or work. Just like with circumcision, Paul says to “stay

where you are.” He does also say that if you have an opportunity to improve your workplace, then take it.

Can you see how, once again, Paul is illustrating that you don’t change your marital status just because you got saved. You don’t change your circumcision status because you got saved and you don’t change your work status because you got saved either.

Paul says not to worry about whether you are a servant or free because servants are free in Christ, and free men are Christ’s servants. If you are a slave and you have a chance to be free, Paul says to take it.

There may be something more to vs. 22 than first meets the eye. Notice the wording.

1 Corinthians 7:22 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.

What does it mean that a servant is the Lord’s freeman? If someone was a slave with an obligation to serve an earthly master, he or she was exempt from serving the Lord (outside of his/her own testimony as a servant). Do you get the meaning? The servant’s obligation before God is to obey their masters as unto the Lord.

Colossians 3:22 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: ²³ And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; ²⁴ Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

Notice that even for those with restricted ability to serve God, there is still the possibility of reward for them as they fill their role as servant in a godly manner.

On the other hand, things are different for the freeman.

1 Corinthians 7:22 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.**

The one who was free from slavery was to be “Christ’s servant.” In other words, there would be no restrictions for them to fully serve the Lord as they have the freedom to do so, and therefore the expectation is for their full service to God.

1 Corinthians 7:23 **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.

This is the second time Paul has said that we are “bought with a price.”

1 Corinthians 6:20 **For ye are bought with a price:** therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

And now, we are off the illustrations and back to the issue of marriage. Verse 24 is saying that no matter where you find yourself, married, divorced, single, you are not alone, for God is with you. This is what is meant when Paul says “abide with God.” I believe the relationship which the believer has with God is meant to be a comfort to those who have difficult marriages with unbelievers, and those who find themselves no longer married and alone.

Now, the topic is about to change to answer the question, “Should I marry?” Paul is going to deal with this question from three perspectives: 1) from the perspective of the virgin, 2) from the perspective of the virgin’s father, and 3) from the perspective of the widow.

The most important decision you will ever make is the decision to trust Christ as your Savior. If you have never trusted in the finished work of Christ – His death, burial and resurrection – then we encourage you to trust Him right now.

Included in this lesson is a QR code. You can scan it with your phone or other electronic device and it will take you to a presentation called “The Most Important Decision.” This is a whiteboard presentation of how to be saved; how to know you

will go to heaven when you die. The presentation isn't very long but it will be the most important decision you will ever make.

We are going to put this QR code in the notes and up on the screen and if you are not sure where you will spend eternity, then here is your chance to know for sure, how to be saved.

If you would like to speak to someone about this, then I encourage you to call us (888) 605-3202 or email us at staff@mbiworldwide.org. We will be glad to help you in this all-important decision.

Having said that, the second most important decision you will make is who you will marry. While this one does not have the eternal ramifications as the first one, it is an important decision that will greatly affect your life.

In vv. 25-35 of 1 Corinthians 7, Paul gives three reasons for choosing not to marry.

Up to now, Paul has been addressing people who are married, or who have been previously married. The first group Paul addresses is "virgins" which the Bible uses to refer to both men and women. We will get into this in our next section.



The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make