

## The Church of the Servant King

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### Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB\_1Cor7B)

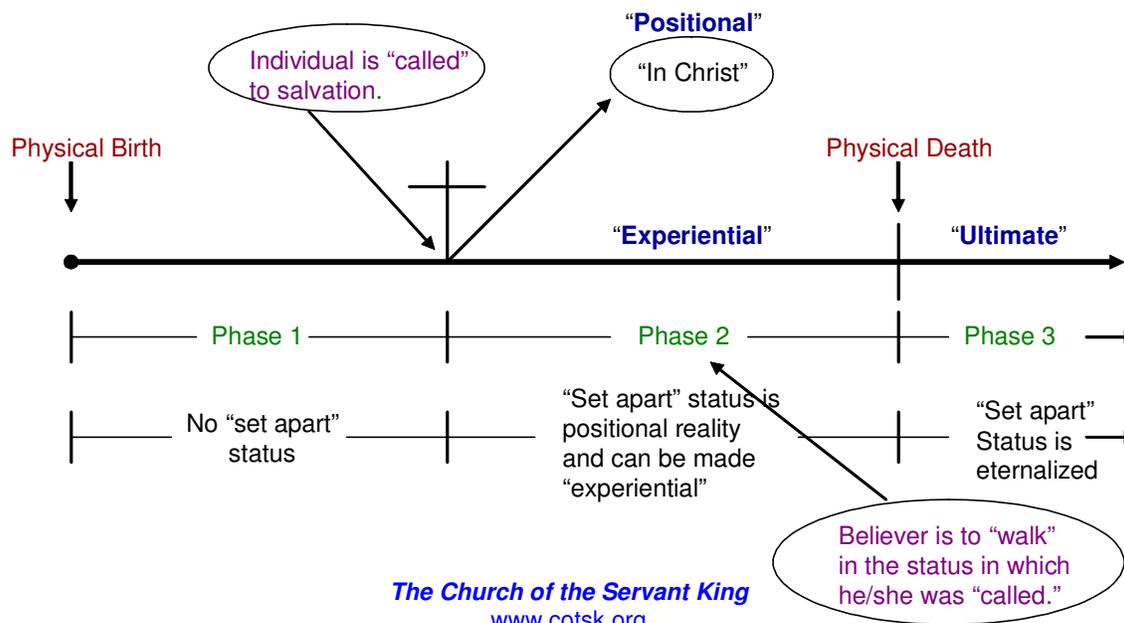
#### **BASIC PRINCIPLES – LIVE IN THE STATUS IN WHICH THEY WERE SAVED (1 COR 7:17-24)**

17 Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. 18 Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. 20 Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. 21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called. (1 Cor 7:17-24)

*Why does Paul seem to diverge from the theme of marriage that was begun in 1 Corinthians 7:1?* In reality, verses 17-24 do not diverge from instruction regarding marriage. Rather, in these verses, Paul teaches on the subject of marriage by way of illustration. In this section of chapter 7, Paul steps back from specific situations to basic principles his readers needed to keep in mind when thinking about marriage (cf. vv. 1-7). He drew his illustrations in this section from circumcision and slavery.

- Paul introduces this section with the statement in verse 17 – “Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk.”
- In this introductory statement, Paul relates his instruction regarding the Phase 2 “walk” of the believer in Corinth to his temporal status at the point of salvation. (See diagram).

### Three Types of Christian Sanctification



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- The Greek word translated “called” in verse 17 is *kaleo* (Gr. καλεω) and in verse 20 *klesis* (Gr. κλησις) and both refer to “God’s effectual call of His people to salvation.”<sup>1</sup>

*Romans 11:29*

29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Rom 11:29)

*Hebrews 3:1*

1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. (Heb 3:1)

- Paul has issued similar instructions in other churches – “and so I direct in all the churches.”

*Ephesians 5:21-6:9*

21 And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. 5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6 not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. 9 And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. (Eph 5:21-6:9)

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<sup>1</sup> Frank E. Gaebelain, general editor, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976-1992), electronic edition.

*Colossians 3:18-4:1*

18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. 22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. 4:1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven. (Col 3:18-4:1)

- In verses 18-20, Paul uses uncircumcision/circumcision as one example of a status that might have existed at the point of salvation for a Corinthian believer.
  - Paul highlights the fact that one's status as a Jew or Jewish proselyte (circumcised) who had observed Jewish tradition and the Mosaic Law has absolutely no bearing upon the "walk" of that believer in Phase 2.
  - Similarly, Paul also highlights the fact that one's status as a Gentile (uncircumcised) who had not observed Jewish tradition and the Mosaic Law has absolutely no bearing upon the "walk" of that believer in Phase 2.

Romans 2:25

25 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. (Rom 2:25)

Galatians 5:6

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. (Gal 5:6)

- What matters in Phase 2 according to Paul's instructions in these verses is the keeping of the "commandments of God."
  - What are the "commandments of God" for the believer of the Gentile-centric, church age Body of Christ dispensation?
    - The "commandments of God" for the believer of this dispensation (of which the believers in Corinth are a part) are not the Mosaic Law.
    - The Mosaic Law had been fulfilled by Jesus Christ – the Messiah Who was largely rejected by Israel.
    - The "commandments of God" to which Paul refers is a phrase which encompasses all of Paul's instruction to believers of the present age.
    - As the prior chapters of Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians illustrate, the Corinthians had proven themselves to be extremely adept at not observing the "commandments of God" that had been given to them by Paul (1 Cor 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19 – "do you not know").
  - It is important that we understand Paul's use of the word "called" to refer to salvation (Phase 1) in distinction to any type of "calling" of the believer within Phase 2.
- In verses 20-23, Paul uses a second illustration – slavery vs. freeman status.
    - The principle illustrated is the same; however, there is one slight difference.

- In verse 21, Paul indicates that if the believer was saved when he/she was a slave and is able to become a freeman, then the believer should take advantage of that opportunity.
  - The major point is that the believer who was a slave when he became a believer should not be troubled by that status since we are all free to serve as slaves to Jesus Christ and should view our life from that perspective regardless of temporal status in life.
  - Because of this principle, we should not choose to use our freedom in Christ to become slaves (figuratively) of men – regardless of our temporal status.
- The general sentiment (v. 24) is “contentment” with one’s temporal status, whatever it may have been when one became a believer, so that focus upon one’s spiritual walk and testimony is not lost – “remain with God in that condition in which he was called.”

#### **INSTRUCTIONS TO THE UNMARRIED AND WIDOWS (1 COR 7:25-40)**

25 Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. 26 I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. 29 But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; 30 and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; 31 and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. 32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. 36 But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. 37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. 38 So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. 39 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 40 But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God. (1 Cor 7:25-40) [*Underlined text is mine*]

We must remember that Paul is writing in chapter 7 to address questions that had been raised by the Corinthian believers in a letter they had written to Paul (7:1 – “Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me...”). Evidently, these believers in Corinth had several questions regarding whether the unmarried, including widows and virgins should marry. There are some key phrases in this pericope that help clarify the context of Paul’s instructions:

- “*I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion*” (v. 25); “*in my opinion*” (v. 40) – Paul’s statements in this section are the opinion of a spiritual man who views life and its circumstances through the lens that all of the doctrine that he possesses provides (e.g.

the divine viewpoint of God's purpose in human history, the divine viewpoint of God's purpose in the lives of believers of the Gentile-centric age of the Body of Christ vs. prior ages, and the divine and eternal perspective of the passing nature of the things of this world including marriage). These are not instructions that are derived from any specific statement of the Lord Jesus Christ during His public ministry or to Paul in particular.

- "In view of the present distress" (v. 26); "the time has been shortened" (v. 29); "the form of this world is passing away" (v. 31); – We can speculate regarding what exactly the present distress may have been to which Paul referred. However, whatever it was, it set the context for Paul's statements.

The apostle explains that the time for doing the Lord's work is short and is coming to an end. This does not necessarily mean that he is speaking of the second coming of Christ, for Paul may have been anticipating severe persecutions and a resulting curtailment of freedom to witness. So for the time remaining Paul admonishes them not to be overwhelmed by the social and material problems of the world but to live as for the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

- "I am trying to spare you" (v. 28); "this I say for your own benefit" (v. 35) – Paul's desire was that the things of this world, while not sinful and certainly permissible for the believer to use and enjoy, not become a distraction to the believer's main focus.
- "To promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord" (v. 35) – Paul states his motivation for these believers.

All of these phrases help us understand the context in which Paul was writing. Before we seek to make application of the passage to us today, we must understand that Paul was addressing the believers in Corinth in view of their present set of circumstances. Then, we can proceed to look for the applications pertinent to our lives.

*Who is the "man" with a virgin daughter – the father of the virgin or the man who desires to marry the virgin?* A first reading of verses 36-38 seems to point to the man as the father of the virgin daughter; however, there is a second possibility as well.

**36** But who is meant by "he" is in v. 36, the father of the virgin or the man who is engaged to her? Some have even interpreted the second view to mean that the virgin was a "spiritual" bride who lived with the man as a virgin. This latter view presents problems in the light of the Scriptures that teach that a man is to cleave to his wife and they are to be one flesh (Gen 2:24) and to "be fruitful" (Gen 1:28).

The decision as to whether the "he" is father or fiance turns on the meaning of *gamizo* ("marry") in v. 36. Frequently, verbs ending in *izo* are causative. If this is so here, then the translation "he who causes or gives his virgin to be married" would mean that "he" indicates the father, who in ancient times arranged for his daughter's marriage.

But another viable view is that *gamizo* is not causative here, but is equivalent to *gameo* ("to marry"). If so, then "he" refers to the man who is considering the possibility of marrying his fiancée.

Two arguments speak in favor of the second interpretation. First, v. 38b has no object expressed for the verb *gamizo* and so the verb can better be translated "marry," not "cause to marry." Second, *gameo* ("marry") is used in the plural in v. 36, "They should get married," where one might expect the singular form of *gamizo* if Paul meant to say, "Let *him* give her in marriage." So the teaching is

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<sup>2</sup> Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Commentary*.

that if the situation in Corinth seems to be unfair to a particular virgin and especially if (*ean* with the subjunctive) she is passing her prime marriageable years, then the fiance should go ahead and marry her. The word *hyperakmos* literally means "beyond the peak" of life, and so can be translated "if she should be getting along in years." Paul adds that there is no sin in their getting married (v. 36).

**37, 38** In contrast, the man who feels no need to get married has done the right thing too. (The words "who is under no compulsion" refer to outward pressure to marry, such as some prior engagement contract or the pressure of a master on a slave.) However, Paul favors the man who does not marry (v. 38).<sup>3</sup>

*So, to whom is Paul referring and what did he mean?* We must remember that chapter 7 began with Paul addressing the distortions of marriage and sexual relations in marriage by the ascetically trended individuals within the church at Corinth. This ascetic group was a contrast to the lascivious group Paul addressed in prior chapters. In both cases, the ascetic and the lascivious, there had been distorted practices that were being promoted by certain segments of the church in Corinth – all under the guise of being more spiritual.

Here, Paul addresses the situation of a virgin. There is support for either interpreting the "any man" of verse 36 as the father of the virgin daughter or the fiancée of a virgin woman. However, the Greek word *gamizo* usually means "give in marriage" and *gameo* means to "marry." This seems to shift the weight in favor of interpreting "any man" as the father of the virgin – consistent with the way the passage reads in the NASV above.

Such a father may have been reluctant to give his virgin daughter in marriage in view of what Paul had written about a preference toward remaining single if unmarried (vv. 8, 28-34). He might also have hesitated because of ascetic influences in the church that were due to a false sense of "spirituality" and possibly an overreaction to the fornication in Corinth. External pressure from the ascetic Corinthians or from what Paul himself had just written should not constrain him. The father should follow his own convictions ("authority over his own will") about giving in marriage or marriage – not the false standards being promoted by certain individuals.

So at the end Paul has agreed, and disagreed, with the Corinthians in their letter. They prefer celibacy for 'spiritual' reasons; he prefers it for pastoral and eschatological ones. But quite in contrast to them, he also affirms marriage; indeed, he does so strongly: Such a man 'does well.'

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<sup>3</sup> Gabaelein, *The Expositor's Commentary*.