

SDG

1 Corinthians 7:17–24 (NKJV)

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. **20** Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. **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. **23** You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. **24** Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

A CHRISTIAN'S CALL IS TO CONTINUE IN HIS CALLING

INI

"The call" is a concept with a wide variety of understanding depending on your religious background. I remember discussing with one gentleman how I was in Seminary training to be a pastor. He asked me, when did you know this was your calling? He expected me to have had some divine vision or intervention that told me I should become a pastor. In our church synod, however, the divine call does not come in the form of an inner feeling, it comes in the form of you members here at Ascension voting and deciding to "call" me to be your pastor – that was when I knew this was my calling, because the Bible declares that when a congregation elects to call a pastor and he accepts the call it is divine; it is not just from man, but from God.

Now how do you know what your calling is? Is it an inner feeling, compulsion, or vision? How do you know you are doing what God wants you to be doing? The concept of the Christian calling in the way we will be discussing it today may be thought of as basically, whatever position, office, job, status, responsibilities God has placed you in (v.17). As we consider this concept we boil it down to the basic elements. We consider those basic responsibilities and priorities that God has revealed is part of your work in the kingdom – things like job, family, church, and God. If you had a NKJ Bible like mine you would notice that in verse 24 it italicizes the word "state." "Let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called. The italics means the word "state" is not actually found in the original language. The translator is trying to convey the concept of what is being said. A Christian's call is to continue in his calling – to continue in that state and recognize the responsibilities the Lord has set before him or her.

1. Your call is from the Lord

Your call is from the Lord. (**v.17**) This speaks firstly of your divine call to the Christian faith – something that is the same for every one of us. **1 Peter 2:9 (NKJV) – 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special**

people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

This call has come from God. The verb in verse 17 “the Lord has called” in the original pictures a state that you now live in. It pictures your call to the Christian faith, out of darkness into the light, as a abiding truth that you stand in. That is a comforting reminder that the good news of Christ–conquered–sin abides with us. It does not change. And so our life should reflect this – abiding in the call from the Lord. As Paul also says in Ephesians: **Ephesians 4:1–3 (NKJV) — 1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

However the Apostle gets into even more specific examples in our text. He digs into what we might think of “sub-callings.” That is – how does your calling out of darkness affect every other aspect of your life? Where do you find yourself and your life right now? Where do your responsibilities lie? What are your priorities? What does verse 20 mean when it says ... **(v.20)**?

While the call to live the life we’ve been given in Christ is universal for all Christians, the application of this to each one of your individual situations and roles in God’s kingdom is not. Some are parents, some are children ... some are pastors, some are Sunday School teachers ... some are employed, some are not.

And yet these, though from the Lord, do change. You do not remain children forever, you do not remain jobless forever, you do not remain members of the church council forever. Our responsibilities change – they change as God reveals these changes. Picture for instance the ambitious young couple just married, who want to travel the world. They both have plans to seek careers and to be on the move. Yet unexpectedly, they become pregnant. Things change. And we are called to follow the Lord’s lead. **Proverbs 16:9 (NKJV) — 9 A man’s heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.**

One commentator states it this way, “To remain in one’s calling means not to give it up or forsake it, not to change one’s position or office, but rather to pursue it until God says: thus far and no further” (FFG Harders, JoTh June 1997).

Our Annual meeting today will feature the election of chairmans for both the Board of Outreach and the Board of Education. Whoever is elected is receiving a call, not from men, but from the Lord. Maybe you wonder if you have time to help with this or that. Maybe it seems there is always something more pressing at home. And maybe there is. However where ever you find yourself, father, mother, son, daughter, employee, employer – know that this is your calling from the Lord; “as God has distributed to each one...”

Paul uses some practical examples that the Corinthians were dealing with. Circumcision — Prior to Christ's coming, circumcision was not optional for God's people. It was part of God's covenant with Israel to mark them as His own. However now that Christ has come it is no longer needed. The Old Covenant has been fulfilled. Now baptism marks us as God's own. Circumcision is now what we call an adiaphora – something neither commanded nor forbidden by God. Circumcised? Do not try to hide your Jewishness. Uncircumcised? Do not seek to become a Jew.

This is not always easy. The uncircumcised Gentile faced great persecution at times from unbelieving Jews. The temptation was to simply become circumcised and avoid all these disputes. The temptation is there for us too. As a mother – meeting the needs of the family; juggling kids; juggling a job perhaps . . . As a father – working a full-time job, raising a family; being needed in two places at once . . . As a spouse – maybe your marriage is not what you wish it to be, maybe your children aren't acting the way you hope they would . . . As an employee – not working your dream job, putting up with a boss who doesn't like you, dealing with co-workers who keep making your life more difficult. As one who is sick, as one who is troubled, ... There are times where we want to abandon our responsibilities and find something better.

Interesting that Paul doesn't say that the Lord will not redefine our calling and change our responsibilities. Your present state will not remain so forever. In speaking to slaves, Paul says, **(v.21b)** If the slave is given the opportunity to be made free, he should take advantage of it. Maybe the Lord will reveal some other path for you in this life that we could not yet imagine.

What a comfort that such calls – to our family, to our church, against sin, to the gospel – are from the Lord. I remember my grandpa speaking of his work as a minister. In difficult times he would simply say to God – “well, you called me here.” By this he meant, if my call is from the Lord, surely it is his work, not mine; surely he will see it through; surely he will strengthen me and uphold me. As verse 24 says, you remain “with God” in that state in which you have been called. **Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV) — 10 Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'**

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2. Your call is to freedom (as slaves of Christ)

(v.21-23) Your call is to freedom (as slaves of Christ, that is). A paradox is presented here. For we are both slave and free at the same time. Paul directly addresses those Christians who were physically slaves in his day. And while it might seem self-implied that liberated through the death of Christ on the cross, a slave would by no means remain under the control of his master; he is free – isn't he?

Well, yes, Paul says, slaves are free. And yet this is a freedom that we have spiritually not physically. Slaves, in submitting to their master, be he evil or good, were living their freedom in Christ. I mean by this, the slave by remaining in his calling was glorifying

God; by working faithfully for his master he was showing his freedom from sin, his service to Christ.

“Do not become slaves of men.” That is, the world is going to throw all kinds of reasons at you to make you justify not fulfilling your call. Men are going to entice with all sorts of appealing reasons why it is ok to sin, why everyone else is doing it, why you don’t deserve to be treated this way, why you should be liberated, and why the grass is greener elsewhere.

We see this in man’s approach to abortion ... in many church’s teaching that homosexuality is natural and right ... in regard to some church’s approach to marriage and divorce ... in some men’s opinion on women in the church and in marriage ...

(v.19) This is the difference between being slaves of men and slaves of Christ. Your call is to freedom as slaves of Christ. This is the difference between our approach to what we call “adiaphora” – something neither commanded nor forbidden by God – and our approach to those things for which God’s word does speak. We find countless “adiaphora” in our life. Should I go grocery shopping or read a book? Should I watch the game or shovel the sidewalk? Should I wear the striped or the solid tie today? Should we sing out of the worship supplement or out of the Lutheran Hymnal? What really matters is keeping – literally “treasuring” – the commandments of God. This is where we are called to walk worthy of our call.

And that command that governs all our doings in life is love. Love is what we are called to in all things. This is what it means to be free and this is what it means to be slaves of Christ. **John 13:34 (NKJV) – 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.**

Do we continue in our calling when we are faced with the temptation to gossip about someone, to break the 8th commandment? Are we continuing in our calling when we choose to do something we enjoy rather than helping our spouse with something they need? Do we continue in our calling when we complain about the job we have or the rules our parents?

This is why our Savior died. **(v.23)** It was Christ who laid down the costly payment to redeem you from your slavery to men and sin. **Colossians 1:13–14 (NKJV) – 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.** This is what redemption means – to be bought back, it pictures the price needed to free a slave. We belong to our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

But our Savior does not rule us like ruthless Pharaoh who would continue to lay heavier and heavier burdens on the Israelites. He lays down His life for us. He takes the burden off us. As Lord He leads, He guides, He tenderly motivates us by His love. So picture yourself as a sheep guided by this Good Shepherd – called by name, no leash, with no leash – rather free to walk the path before you. All by the work of our Savior.

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Amen.