

Cornerstone Community Church

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6/22/25

Contentment in God's Calling

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

Cornerstone Introduction...

Read: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

Sermon Introduction

I have entitled my sermon "Contentment in God's Calling." Paul doesn't use the word "content" or "contentment," but this is a principle Paul is using in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24. Whether single or married, widowed or divorced, whether Jew or Gentile, etc. He tells the Corinthians that they are to remain in the condition in which God called them.

We should start by asking what is contentment? The common use of the word "contentment" is an emotional state of peace and happiness. Worldly contentment is based on favorable circumstances.

For example, many Californians felt happy and content that the Dodgers won the 2024 World Series! We could relive moments in the series like Freddie Freeman's grand slam at the bottom of the 9th inning with two outs! Or being behind to the Yankees 5-0 in the fifth inning of game 5 and then coming back to not only win the game but win the series!

Now if you were a Yankees fan (or even a SF Giants fan), I would venture to say you would be a bit discontent.

But Christian contentment is different than worldly contentment in that Christian contentment is based on invisible realities, on the future promises of God and the enabling presence of God's Spirit.

Jeremiah Burroughs gives a great definition of contentment in his book, "The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment." He writes: "Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit that freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."

Contentment is not merely waiving the white flag. "God is God and He will do what He will do so I guess I just have to endure."

Instead, Christian contentment says “I trust God, I love Him, I know everything He decides to do is right. In heaven I will celebrate even the smallest details of His decisions in my life. But I do not need to wait until I get to heaven; so I will delight in them now!

This brings us to the main point of our text today...

In our passage this morning, 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, Paul writes to believers in Corinth who were also tempted to think that contentment could be found in a change of circumstances. Some thought they needed a new social status, a different marital situation, or more personal freedom in order to be truly satisfied or useful to God.

But Paul instructs them with pastoral care and gospel truth to remind them, and us, that joy and purpose are not found in chasing something “better,” but in trusting God and faithfully walking with Christ right where He has placed us.

Main Point: In 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, Paul gives three lessons about God’s providence and the gospel so that Christians can be content and serve Christ in every circumstance.

Outline:

Be Content in Your Father’s Providence (17)

Be Content in Your Identity in Christ (18–20)

Be Content in Your Circumstances to Serve the Lord (21–24)

I. Be Content in Your Father’s Providence (17)

Look with me in your Bible at verse 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.”**

Our passage begins with the word **Only**. This word could also be translated “nevertheless,” “however,” or “however that may be.” It’s important to see that this is a continuation of what Paul has written throughout the beginning of this chapter.

Paul is further explaining the issues related to singleness, marriage, divorce, and marriage to an unbeliever. That being said, let’s do a quick review of the context to help us better understand the verses before us.

As John Marc pointed out last week, part of the confusion in the Corinthian church stemmed from wrong view of marriage and singleness. Some believers, likely influenced by Greek philosophy, believed that celibacy made a person more spiritual or holy in God’s sight. They believed that abstaining from physical intimacy and marriage was the path to true godliness.

On the other side, others were insisting, “To be truly obedient to God, you must be married,” viewing singleness as a failure to fulfill God’s design for humanity as reflected in Genesis 1:28.

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes with pastoral concern to this confusion in the church. Rather than siding with one extreme or the other, he offers biblical truth rooted in the gospel. He affirms both singleness and marriage as good gifts from God.

In verses 17–24, he connects these issues to the providence of God, a believer’s new gospel identity, and the reality that Christians can glorify Christ in any set of circumstances. In this sense, Paul is biblically counseling the Corinthians. He is gently correcting their wrong assumptions and pointing them to the truth.

In verse 17 Paul lays down the principle of contentment in God’s providence which is actually repeated in verse 20 and 24. Look again at verse 17, he says **“as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk.”**

The language here is clear. Paul reminds the Corinthians that it is God who has sovereignly assigned, or apportioned, to each believer their particular life situation and circumstances.

The word Paul uses for **“called”** is in the perfect tense in the Greek, which is important. It tells us that God’s calling is not limited to a past event, like the moment of conversion, but is ongoing all the way to the believer’s present condition.

So, Paul is saying: If you are in Christ, then God’s call upon your life is not only in the past but it is upon you right now, in the exact circumstances you are in. Your current condition is not random or outside of God’s plan.

This truth should be a comfort to us. When we lose sight of God’s providence and sovereignty over the details of our lives, we become susceptible to discontentment. We start to find fault with our circumstances and begin desiring that things should be different.

But when we remember our Father’s providential control and trust His heart, believing that He is loving, wise, and good then we can rest in the assurance that He is the One who has assigned us our specific situation. And when we see our lives through that lens, we can be grateful knowing that God is using even the smallest details of our lives for our good and for His glory.

This also frees us to focus on being faithful to God where we are. Your circumstances have been purposely and providentially assigned, and, in those circumstances, you are called to live faithfully for Him. That is why Paul says, **“in this manner let him walk.”**

Once again, we need to keep the immediate context in view, so we don't lose sight of Paul's intention. Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to think that singleness is wrong, or that marriage is wrong, or even that being married to an unbelieving spouse (if that is your situation by God's providence) is inherently wrong or something that must be changed.

His point is this: be content in God's providence and pursue faithfulness within it. Don't be preoccupied with trying to change your circumstances. Instead, be preoccupied with living faithfully in the circumstances God has wisely and lovingly assigned to you.

This is, at its core, the message of the book of Ecclesiastes. If ever there were a clear example that changing our circumstances doesn't guarantee contentment, it would be the life of Solomon. His life is a lesson in the futility of chasing satisfaction through our circumstances.

Think about the lies we often tell ourselves: "If I just had more money... if I just had more possessions... if I just had more success, more authority, more freedom, more time, [fill in the blank], then I'd be content." We fall victim to believing that contentment is found in a change of our situation.

But Solomon was the wisest, richest, and most powerful man of his time. Yet when he pursued contentment through wealth, pleasure, power, and achievement, he discovered it was all "vanity of vanities." It was empty, fleeting, and in the meaningless in the ultimate sense.

The things we want to change in our lives are temporary and cannot provide lasting peace. True contentment, Solomon tells us at the end of Ecclesiastes, is found not in changing our situation but in our relationship with God. He concludes the book of Ecclesiastes with this:

Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

In other words, God is sovereign, and we are accountable. He knows where He has placed us, and His providence is not a mistake. So, our focus should not be on changing our situation, but on being faithful within it.

We don't need to manipulate our circumstances in search of peace. We need to trust the hand of our Father and walk in obedience where He's placed us. That is where true, lasting contentment is found. But Paul wants us to know that our contentment is also found in our new gospel identity.

II. Be Content in Your Identity in Christ (18–20)

Look at verse 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.”**

Paul begins to give an example to show how the gospel redefines a believer’s identity. We are no longer defined by external distinctions. He writes, **“Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised.”**

At first glance, this is confusing statement. What does it mean to “become uncircumcised”? There was actually a surgical procedure in the ancient world that attempted to reverse circumcision. This is attested in 1 Maccabees and described in the writings of Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian.

This procedure was often sought by Jewish men living in Greco-Roman culture who felt the weight of social shame and pressure. In that society, circumcision was viewed with disdain. And athletic training in the gymnasium, where men trained unclothed, was highly esteemed.

As a result, some Jewish men, motivated by the fear of man and a desire for social acceptance, pursued this surgical procedure in hopes of blending in, avoiding ridicule, and elevating their social standing in society. But Paul tells them not to do that. The external distinction isn’t important.

Paul then flips the example and speaks to Gentiles seeking circumcision. To them Paul says, **“Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised.”** These men may have been tempted to adopt Jewish practices to appear more spiritual.

Yet just like the Jewish men seeking uncircumcision, they were probably motivated by the fear of man and a desire for social acceptance, pursued this surgical procedure in hopes of blending in, avoiding ridicule, and elevating their social standing in the church. But Paul tells them not to do that. The external distinction isn’t important.

Why? Because in Christ, those external distinctions no longer define you. There’s no need to try to change your status to win the approval of others. Being in Christ is the greatest acceptance and approval a person could receive. There is no higher status one could achieve.

To be in Christ means that your sins have been forgiven, that your relationship with your Maker has been restored, and that no matter what happens in this life, you have an eternal hope and eternal home in Him.

This is why Paul can say what he says in the next verse. Look at verse 19: **“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.”**

Christ’s redemptive work through the gospel has nullified all previous designations and classifications by which the world assigns worth. No matter what your marital status you’re your ethnic background, your social status, your education level, your level of wealth, or whatever external distinction people use to evaluate each other, none of that ultimately matters. In Christ, those external differences no longer define a person’s value or spiritual standing.

Becoming a new creation in Christ is not dependent on social standing or external distinctions, but on the inward work of grace that leads to obedience. Faithfulness in God’s eyes is not measured by what class or category we belong to, but by whether we walk in obedience to His commands. Obedience is the true and only mark of faithfulness that the Lord esteems.

As many of you know, Indian society has historically been structured around what’s known as the caste system. Within this system, there are four primary castes: There is one for the priests and scholars, another for the warriors and rulers, another for merchants and traders, and lastly one for laborers and service providers.

But outside of this structure is a fifth designation, those known as the Dalits, often referred to as the “untouchables.” Dalits are considered so low in the social hierarchy that they are viewed as outside the caste system entirely. Historically, they have been assigned the most degrading tasks, such as cleaning toilets, handling dead animals, and scavenging. They have been the victims of severe social exclusion and injustice.

But here is the beauty and power of the gospel: all external distinctions sinful man uses to assign worth to one another become insignificant in Christ. You see, in Christ through the gospel, the poorest and most disregarded Dalit beggar can have equal standing with a man like Jeff Bezos if they both turned from their sin and turned to Christ in faith.

This is why, each Sunday, the person preaching says we are all sinners in need of a Savior, and that the ground at the foot of the cross is level. We are all in equal need of Christ and in Christ, we have equal standing.

Every worldly distinction whether caste, class, wealth, ethnicity, education, or marital status is given equal status and a new identity in the family of God. The single is equal to the married. The Jew is equal to the Gentile. The rich is equal to the poor. The educated is equal to the uneducated.

That's the beauty of the grace of the gospel. Paul then he repeats the principle. Look at verse 20: **"Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called."**

In essence, he repeats, "you can be content in your Father's providence, you can be content in your identity in Christ." But there is one more truth Paul wants to share with them.

III. Be Content in Your Circumstances to Serve the Lord (21–24)

Paul continues in verses 21–23: **"Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 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. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men."**

Paul gives another example to illustrate the principle. He presents the case of a person who was called to faith in Christ while in the condition of slavery. To our modern ears, this may sound like an extreme scenario, but in the Roman world slavery was a part daily life.

It has been estimated that within the Roman Empire, one-third of the population were slaves, one-third were former slaves, and one-third were born free. Slavery, therefore, was not only common it was woven into the fabric of society. So, this example would have been relevant and personal to many within the Corinthian church.

And yet, as common as slavery was in the first century, it was more often than not a difficult and dehumanizing condition. Slaves were not considered legal persons. They had no rights, no protections, and were classified as property. They were seen as living tools to be used by their masters. And this was a sentiment widely accepted in Greco-Roman culture.

What's surprising, then, is what Paul says: **"Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it."** This is not a callous or indifferent statement. Paul is not dismissing the hardship of slavery. Rather, in the context of the larger principle, he's teaching that one can serve Christ faithfully in whatever circumstances God has assigned. In effect, he is saying, "Don't let that limiting circumstances determine your usefulness to the Lord."

On the surface, it might appear that a slave, with limited time and freedom would be unable to serve Christ meaningfully. Their entire daily life was subject to the will of an earthly master. But Paul assures them: "Don't worry about it."

Your ability to walk with Christ and serve Him is not canceled by your circumstances. It may look limiting from the outside, but you belong to a greater Master and He can be glorified in any circumstance.

Paul does add: **“if you are able also to become free, rather do that.”** Seeking freedom was not wrong. Changing your circumstances, if possible, was not sinful. But his larger point is that such a change is not necessary in order to serve Christ faithfully.

Why? Because, as Paul reminds us, **“You were bought with a price.”** Christ has redeemed you. Your ultimate identity and calling are not rooted in your circumstances but in your union with Him. Whether slave or free, all believers are the Lord’s servants, and they are fully capable of honoring Him wherever He has placed them.

In context, Paul is applying this principle to the Corinthian believers who were wrestling with questions about singleness, marriage, divorce, and even being married to an unbelieving spouse. Some were tempted to believe that their current relational status was limiting their ability to serve Christ. But Paul is saying, “Don’t be anxious about your circumstances. Be faithful where you are.”

And this principle applies to us today. Maybe your work schedule is demanding and keeps you from serving more at church. Maybe you’re a parent of young children and feel that all your time and energy is consumed at home. Perhaps you’re married to someone who does not share your faith, and you feel limited in how you can use your home or your time for ministry. Maybe you were once single and had more time to give to others, but marriage or family life has shifted your availability.

Whatever your situation, Paul’s message is this: Don’t let your circumstances cause you to become discontent and lose sight of serving Christ exactly where you are.

Trust the providence of God. Abide in Christ. Serve Him right where you are. Be a faithful witness at work and pray for your co-workers. Cherish your children and find delight in teaching them God’s Word. Serve your unbelieving spouse, pray for them, and be the aroma of Christ to them and in your home. If you were single and now married look to use this new season

God is not measuring your faithfulness by your quantifiable productivity, but by your obedience. And the good news is that obedience, though sometimes costly, is always possible. Wherever He has placed you, you are free in Christ to live for Him.

I met a missionary named Jack a couple of years ago while visiting the Pruetts at Ethnos360 Aviation.

Jack had spent many years ministering near the Amazon rainforest, seeking to reach a nomadic tribe that was constantly on the move and often inaccessible. The work was slow,

difficult, and filled with challenges. Learning the language, building trust, and even locating the tribe at times proved incredibly difficult.

After years of laboring there, Jack eventually had to return home to care for his aging parents. I asked him if, during all those years, they had been able to translate the Bible or share the gospel fully with the tribe. He looked at me and, somewhat somberly, said, “No.” Because of the tribe’s constant movement and the unique challenges they faced, the work remained unfinished. Missionaries are still there, continuing the work Jack was a part of.

Now, if God measured success by visible results, numbers, and completed goals then Jack’s years of service might appear unsuccessful and even wasted. But that is not how God measures faithfulness.

Jack went to that tribe with the love of Christ in his heart, driven by a desire to see Jesus glorified in the salvation of a people who had never heard His name. Based on these verses and several others I believe when Jack stands before Christ's throne one day, he will not be rebuked for his lack of results, he will be rewarded for his faithfulness.

Because in the eyes of our Lord, faithfulness matters more than results. God calls us to obey, to trust, and to serve. And Jack’s story reminds us that God delights in every act of obedience in faithful service to Him.

Paul repeats the principle in final verse of our section, verse 24: “Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.”

Whether the circumstances are related to singleness or marriage or any number of other things, we can find ourselves discontent and unable to see the blessing of God’s providence in our lives.

Because of Christ and the gospel, you can:

Be Content in Your Father’s Providence

Be Content in Your Identity in Christ

Be Content in Your Circumstances to Serve the Lord

But for those of you who have not yet trusted in Christ, you need to hear that no change in your circumstances will ever bring you the lasting contentment you long for. It won’t matter if you finally get the raise, the house, the spouse, the children, the success, the recognition, none of it will satisfy you apart from Christ.

Because the real problem is not our circumstances but our sin. Our sin separates us from the God we were made to know. And unless that separation is dealt with, no external improvement

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can fix the unrest in your heart. But the good news is that Jesus Christ came to do exactly that. Jesus offers you Himself, not necessarily a better life, but a new life. A forgiven life. A life at peace with your Creator.

So I pray you would turn from your sin and trust in Christ. Lay hold of the treasure that no money can buy and no circumstance can take away. Come to Christ and find in Him a contentment and joy that nothing in this world can provide.

Let's Pray.

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 9:8 adapted: "Now may God make all grace abound to you, so that you will have all sufficiency in everything, and may have an abundance for every good deed."