

Title: Is the Grass really Greener?

Text: 1 Corinthians 7.17-24

Theme: Remaining in your calling

Series: 1 Corinthians #28

Prop Stmt. Each believer needs to learn to remain in the situation to which he is called.

For thousands of years people experienced a sense of connection to the earth because most people worked on farms or in gardens. Society was largely agricultural. Today, the family farm has given way to agricultural conglomerates. We generally do not grow our own food, in fact, many people do not even cut their own grass. The idea of a homestead that remains in the family is long gone. We move from community to community, city to city, state to state. We are not a rooted people. We find it easier to have virtual friends on the internet than real life ones in person. We are constantly running, but we never arrive. We are constantly buying, but we are never satisfied. We are constantly going to school, but we do not gain wisdom. We are constantly watching the news and the world on camera. We know more about the lives of actors than we do about our neighbors. We are busy people. We are constantly on the go, but we never get anywhere. We are constantly trying to reinvent ourselves. I wonder how disappointing it is to go through an extreme makeover and still be the same person with the same problems and the same life? The people in Corinth were making changes too. Some of them thought that Christianity was the ticket to changing their circumstances and since they now found the key to living, this would make all of their problems go away.

But, Christianity is not the secret to changing all of your circumstances. There is no secret code to learn, no special, magic prayer to pray that will function like a divine wand sprinkling angel sparkly dust on everything and making it better. What Christ does is change you from the inside out. Your external condition is still just that. But, Christianity enables you to see it in a completely different light. Your gender is still your gender, your racial identity is still that, your social status is still that, but now, there is so much more to you than just that. While the world is clawing and scraping its way in an effort to find the perfect situation, you do not have to have a perfect world in order to completely enjoy God and serve him effectively.

Read Text:

In a chapter where Paul is dealing with marriage, singleness, divorce and remarriage, he shows how these issues are part of a bigger picture

Notice that verses 17, 20 and 24 are very similar. The big idea of this passage is obvious: learn to be content in the situation that God has placed you in. You do not have to change your situation in order to be effective for Christ. In fact, take advantage of the opportunities that you have in your current position. The immediate context (7.1-16) is dealing with marriage. If you are married and you come to faith in Christ and your spouse does not, do not become discontent with your marriage and think that you need a new spouse. This concept of being content in your marriage is part of a bigger picture for

a believer. You do not have to have a perfect marriage in order to become what God wants in your life. Neither do you have to find the perfect life situation in order to enjoy and flourish in the life that God has given you. Grow where God plants you. Take advantage of all of the opportunities in which God has placed you. You can become so focused and controlled on what you do not have, that you fail to exploit in a God-honoring way all that you already have. Your freedom in life is not based on how you can change your circumstances, but on how you deal with the circumstances that you cannot change.

The call to Christ affects everything about your life so that your status in marriage becomes a reflection of your calling, your race becomes a reflection of your calling, and your work is not your calling, your work is a reflection of your calling. Your calling is to Christ. Becoming a follower of Christ does not eliminate those distinctions; it just puts them in their proper place, which is not at the top of the list. In the church there were Christians who were married and those who were single. In the church of Corinth there were Christians who were Jewish and Christians who were Gentile. In the church of Corinth there were Christians who were slaves and Christians who were free. In the church of Corinth there were men and there were women. When a man becomes a follower of Christ, he does not stop being a man, just as a woman who becomes a follower of Christ does not stop being a woman. Even though our gender defines us to some degree, our identity in Christ defines us even deeper. Our gender distinctions do not go away, but instead they are understood in a different light. Our status in marriage defines us to some degree, whether we are married, single, divorced – whatever, but, our mutual identity in Christ defines us at a much deeper level. Therefore, those who are married do not need to feel awkward around those who are single and those who are single do not need to feel awkward around those who are married. Our race defines us to some degree, but our identity as followers of Christ defines us and affects us at a much deeper level than race. Those who are white do not need to apologize or feel awkward for being white. Those who are black do not need to apologize or feel awkward for being black. Our social status affects us to some degree. I do not have to worry about finding an estate manager for my property, you may. I do have to take responsibility for my car, while, you may not have a car. But the fact that I do not have an estate, or the fact that you do not have a car may be a reflection to some degree of our respective positions in what some view as the social food chain, but that does not make us fundamentally different.

1. **Remain in the place God assigned you.** (17-19)

Now, if you look at the outline provided in the bulletin you will notice that there are three points to this message and that all three points are the same. As I mentioned earlier when you look at vs. 17, 20 and 24, you will see that Paul says the same thing three times. Remain in the place that you were, which is where God assigned you, when you became a believer. Now, if you were working as a pimp or prostitute or trafficking in drugs or something that is immoral, or unlawful, then of course you have to change your position. But, for the most part, a person who comes to faith in Christ, should not immediately go about changing everything. At the end of v.17 Paul says that this is the rule that he has

established in all of the churches, it is not something that is unique to Corinth. Here is the first illustration of this point.

A. The illustration – 18-19a

The illustration that Paul uses is more of a personal medical issue to us. But, the issue of circumcision was actually a huge racial and cultural issue that was reflective of a major division that existed between the Jews and the rest of the world.

The church in Corinth had both Jews and Gentiles as part of its mix. There is nothing wrong with being proud of your nationality or ethnicity. There was nothing wrong with a Jew being proud of being a Jew, or of a Greek being Greek. The problem arises when as a follower of Christ you think that being a Jew or Greek or whatever is more important or more significant than being a Christian. When that happens, you promote the idea that your ethnicity is inherently superior to others. There are three aspects to this illustration that help us see what is happening. There is a pattern in these 2 verses that is repeated a couple of verses later. (The question, the command and the explanation)

1) The question – Were you circumcised when you were called?

The idea again is, were you a Jew when you were called to become a follower of Christ? Regardless of how you answer that question, comes the second part which is a command.

2) The command – Do not change.

Then Paul explains why.

3) The explanation – It really does not matter (19)

Your ethnicity is interesting, but when you come to faith in Christ, it really takes a back seat to your new identity in Christ. I know that tracing your family tree can be interesting, but keep in mind that is all that it is. Your family does not make you or change you more than Christ. For example, did you know that Steve Churchill is related to Winston Churchill? What does change about Steve? Nothing!

You may have a family member who has embarrassed you, or who has made you proud. Neither of those really matter when you give an account of your life before God, and neither of those should matter to the body of Christ. We are family based on something that is much deeper than a common biological event, we are family based upon the same God who has given us to His Son, the same Son who has died for us, the same Holy Spirit who has placed us into the body of Christ and has sealed us in Him and is preparing us for eternity.

B. The point – 19b

What is the point? Your racial or family background is not the most important thing in your life. We live in a world that often divides people up on the basis of things that do not really matter. If you do not know what are the issues of life that are significant and eternal in their consequences, then you will be tempted to view people through the wrong lens.

For example (call Van up) What is the obvious difference between Van and me? The obvious difference is, he plays guitar and I play trombone...etc.

2. **Remain in the place God assigned you.** (20-23)

The second point sounds like the first one – doesn't it? It is the same because Paul is repeating himself, on purpose. These verses follow the same pattern as the first section does. While the first part deals with race, this part deals with social status.

A. **The illustration** – 20-22

1) The question – Were you a slave?

Again, just like the first question, it really does not matter how a person answered this. The Roman world was not divided up neatly between slaves and free people. There were slaves who were treated as dirt. These were slaves that served on galley ships and were known as the under-rowers. They were the men who were on the very bottom of a ship, chained to the oars that they would pull, meaning that they would also be the first to drown, unable to get free. There were also slaves who owned land, managed estates and held public office. Slavery was very diverse. So, whether you were a low-class slave, a middle-class slave, a high-class slave, a low-class free person, a middle-class free person or a high-class free person, Paul then says...do not let it trouble you.

2) The command – Do not let it trouble you

There are some things in life that are more important than changing your status as it is viewed by others. Do not be embarrassed about where you live, what you drive, or what kind of a job that you have. Do not allow these surface issues to be the lens through which you view others.

3) The explanation – It really does not matter (22)

The person who is a slave is actually free. The person who is free is actually a slave to Christ. Do you see what this verse is saying? We are all slaves to Christ and we are all free because of Christ. Your status in society is how the world divides you up, but your status in Christ is how Christ unites us. That is exciting stuff isn't it? We all know in our heart of hearts that this is how we should look at others and how we should live, but most people don't know how to do it. Christ is the key and the church is supposed to be arena in which this happens.

Ok, we represent different social levels here. But that is all that they are. Social levels do not determine who we are – Christ does. Therefore, social levels do not determine how we treat each other in our perceived level or out of our perceived level, Christ determines how we treat each other. Therefore, the biggest issue in life is not climbing the ladder, it is pleasing God.

B. The exception – 21b

What wonderful wisdom is here, but Paul also guards against the other extreme. There is nothing wrong with improving your status in life. If you were a slave and you were able to gain your freedom – go for it. That is absolutely fine. But, do not think that improving your status in life is the ultimate issue, it isn't.

C. The point - 23

What is the goal for climbing the ladder? For most people it is being independent. We want financial independence, circumstantial independence and health independence. The key to those is having a successful career and plenty of resources. Ironically, those who pursue their freedom are often in bondage to the process. If you are a follower of Christ, you have all the status you need, do not lower yourself to become a slave to the things that this world craves.

3. Remain in the place God assigned you. (24)

What does this mean for our church? Should we target one ethnic group over another? Should we target one social group over another? Should we try to become a church of white-collar professionals or a church of blue-collar workers? Should we try to be a church of young singles or a church of seasoned saints? Should we focus on Spartan fans, Wolverine fans or Buckeye fans?

I hope that you see it in this text. We can enjoy the different backgrounds that a creative God has given to us, just like we enjoy different instruments in an orchestra. We can appreciate different tastes, different experiences, as long as we realize that there is someone who fundamentally holds us all together.

My mom was teaching 3rd grade in Canton, Ohio. Her class was a happy group of children from different racial backgrounds. One day the kids were playing red rover on the playground and the two teams happened to be divided up on the basis of race. It was not mean, it was just how they divided themselves that day. But one little boy who was a mixture looked at the two lines and did not know which one to join. He went back into the school and found my mom and asked her, who he was. She wisely hugged him and said – Jesus knows!

You know something? That little boy is me and you. No matter who you are you will find someone who will say that you are not white enough or black enough or rich enough or tall enough or thin enough or young enough or educated enough. Our world divides

itself up in ways that really don't matter and everyone of us have at one time been the outsider, looking in, and wondering do I really fit in anywhere. It doesn't matter which boat your ancestors arrived in, we're all leaving on the same shuttle. That is why, we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because through Christ we are able to say with integrity, truth and power – that you belong here. You really belong here, because you belong in Christ.