

I love the zeal and passion of new believers. In our passage today, God gives new believers some advice. The joy and wonder of being born-again can result in some misguided enthusiasm. It seems some new believers wanted everything to be new, including their occupation. So, Paul gave them the Spirit led advice to remain in the calling in which they were called.

17 Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. 1 Corinthians 7:17

Remember that this follows the suggestion for those married to unbelievers to remain in that marriage unless the spouse departs. Paul is continuing the thought of God sovereignly assigning the circumstance of our lives (Acts 17:26ⁱ).

The Greek has the word “each” twice in verse 17 “let each,” “and to each.” God deals with us as individuals. He has a vocational calling for each of us. Later in this letter we will see that gifts are assigned by the Holy Spirit to each person (1 Corinthians 12:7, ⁱⁱ11ⁱⁱⁱ). That is a calling, relating to and blessing others, as the gifts are for the common good of the body of Christ. The vocational calling is also for the good of others, but often in the secular realm. Unfortunately, today our culture has become so focused on self that we look for both a vocation and gifts of the Spirit for selfish reasons rather than to benefit others. Most people have lost the concept of serving others at the leading of God’s Spirit as the way of satisfaction and meaning.

Besides the first use of the word “called” in verse 17, all other uses of call and calling in this passage are speaking of our salvation. Life in Christ is not dependent on any physical thing. Our identity, fulfillment and security are in the call to be a child of God.

Man is restless and always seeking something different. Once we come to Jesus, we need to learn to let the life of Christ be manifest in our lives (2 Corinthians 4:10^{iv}). That is the big change that needs to take place. We will be striving toward that goal until we see Jesus face to face. Our hearts must adjust from self-seeking to God-seeking. Whether single or married, a lawyer or laborer, we must learn to let Christ manifest his life in our present status and circumstances. In other words, let Christ be manifest in the particular life to which you were called, or we could say placed.

It was particularly difficult for many trades at the time because each trade had a god of that trade. When you came to work you were expected to burn incense to that god. If you didn’t and things didn’t go well that day, guess who got blamed. The mockery we receive is nothing to what they had to deal with. It was outright persecution. But every trade needed a witness of the change Jesus makes in lives. Every trade had people searching for the truth. Every field of employment has the same need today.

18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. 1 Corinthians 7:18 When we read “at the time of his call,” we should understand that as the time when God called us to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. This emphasizes the fact that Jesus calls us to Himself. We don’t seek Him unless He is already at work in our hearts (Titus 2:11^v). For many of us, we can remember that exact time when we heard His call to believe and surrender our lives.

Our occupational calling is surrendering who you are where you are to His love, ready to serve, and eager to learn. God is the One who sovereignly placed you where you are and gave you what you have. He did that because of the plans He has for you right there. It may not be comfortable because people knew the old you, but the witness is seen in the change others see in you. We are to be ready to answer when people ask of the hope that lies within us (1 Peter 3:15^{vi}). Watch for those opportunities. Realize that it is by God's design that you are where you are and in the occupation with which you are employed. There are people you meet there to whom God has ordained for you to be a witness (Ephesians 2:10^{vii}).

God may move you on, but grow first where you are planted. You will know when He wants you to make a change. Realize your fulfillment is not in the job itself, but in your relationship to God and how it is expressed in that job. That relationship affects how you influence your work world. Between the ages of 25 to 65 a person works about 96,000 hours. We can walk with God, keeping in step with the Spirit, and we will be investing our lives to influence the area in which God called us for His glory (Ephesians 5:25^{viii}).

I met an electric meter reader (back in the day when meters were read) who was lingering at my meter. I went out to see what was up. He said he takes a moment to pray for the people in each house where he reads the meters. You may have heard how Cathy prayed for those on her mail route and had an opportunity to witness to many of them. I have a dear friend who was a chiropractor. He would ask every patient if he could pray for them, for their problem, and for wisdom on how to help them. Who could refuse that? And you know what happens when you pray with someone? You usher them into the presence of the Lord, and they won't forget it! Just being honest and hardworking and kind is a testimony. If you walk with the Lord, people will notice a difference. That is your testimony, and it will open doors to share about why you are different.

"Luther understood that the Christian is genuinely bi-vocational. He is called first through the Gospel to faith in Jesus Christ and he is called to occupy a particular station or place in life. The second sense of this calling embraces all that the Christian does in service to the neighbor not only in a particular occupation but also as a member of the church, a citizen, a spouse, parent, or child, and worker. Here the Christian lives in love toward other human beings and is the instrument by which God does His work in the world."^{ix}

Now I know some of you are retired. That means you have more time to be versatile. You can be a witness in a club, a homeowners' association, or helpful to your church's ministry or even volunteer to assist missions, as Cathy has done. Some of you ladies help with preparing the food for Wednesday evening, feeding the homeless and the young adults. Your loving help is a witness to them. Some of you are helping with Bible studies. I do four a week, so the help is really appreciated. There is no retirement from Christian service. If I ever retire from preaching, I am sure God will have some other way for me to serve to advance the kingdom of God.

19 For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. 1 Corinthians 7:19 For the Jews, circumcision was the one distinguishing mark that set them apart from Gentiles. When a Jewish man tried to fit in with Greek culture, he would hide the fact that he was circumcised or try to surgically make it appear he was not circumcised. So as important as that was to the Jews, Paul says

outward ritual or signs are no longer significant. Circumcision represented Jews being in a blood covenant in with God (Genesis 17:11^x). Our blood covenant with God was sealed in Jesus' blood on the cross (Colossians 1:20^{xi}). That is the covenant that brings us eternal peace with God (Romans 5:10^{xii}).

Paul was dealing with the Judaizers and their demands that Gentiles keep the law. Paul says it is unnecessary (Ephesians 2:14-16^{xiii}). The commands of God that Paul is telling us to keep are Jesus' commands of the new covenant, to love God with your all and your neighbor as yourself, love one another, and to share Jesus when God gives you the opportunity (Mark 12:33^{xiv}; 16:15^{xv}). He is not speaking of the Levitical law, or he would endorse circumcision for the Gentiles (Galatians 5:6^{xvi}). Jesus is the end/completion of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes, as Paul declared in Romans 10:4^{xvii}.

Slavery is still a problem in our culture, and we want to help those who are trafficked to find freedom. We might instead say if you had gang tattoos before you were called, don't seek laser removal. Or perhaps we could ask, "Were you in a dry, orthodox church when you were called?" Maybe God has you there to be a breath of fresh air and to show genuine zeal for the Lord. Your presence may revive the church, or at least encourage others to go deeper in their faith. Even if one person sees the change and knows that is what they too need, it is worth it! Of course, you should also find a small group where you can grow and be nurtured as well.

The principle is that wherever you are when you came to a real relationship with Jesus of Scripture, see what God wants to do with you right there. You aren't there by accident. Of course, there are some situations that are a temptation or just plain ungodly, and in those cases, you will be a witness by leaving. However, for most people, where you are is the place where God wants you to be a witness of His life and love.

²⁰ Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. ²¹ Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) ²² For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. 1 Corinthians 7:20-22 If you are a bondservant, serve the master as you would serve Jesus (Ephesians 6:5-7^{xviii}). This was when a person had sold themselves into slavery to cover a debt. They were considered the lowest in society, but Paul says it doesn't matter. You are the Lord's slave. Work as unto the Lord and the Lord will reward you. You are freer than your master who is a slave to sin (John 8:34^{xix}).

They would sometimes have the opportunity to pay off the debt and be released from service or would be given the freedom because of their hard work and faithfulness. Paul says that if they had that opportunity then go ahead and take it. That is the exception to remaining as you were when you were saved. I suppose you could relate that to working for a boss who is very difficult and doesn't allow you to speak about your faith. If you have an opportunity to work in a better environment where you are freer to share, then take that opportunity God has set before you.

We are often tempted to complain about our situation. If slaves, whose time was almost entirely consumed in obedience to their master, could serve the Lord with joy in those conditions, then how can we complain? No matter how difficult your occupation is, it can't be as difficult as that of the Christian slaves in the first century.

A free person should consider Jesus to be his or her master. We want to do His will. Our own desires can enslave us and keep us from doing what is best for us and for God's glory (1 Corinthians 9:19^{xx}). We are freer when we are in submission to Christ.

While we don't deal with that kind of debtors' slavery, the idea of being free to obey Christ is the same. The emphasis is that in whatever we do we should be glorifying Jesus in the way we do it (1 Corinthians 10:31^{xxi}), rather than being enslaved to selfish passions.

Sometimes we think that if we are retired or supported by others, only then can we be in full-time ministry. But the biblical perspective is that every believer is a minister in their individual calling and occupation (2 Corinthians 5:18^{xxii}). **Jesus was a builder for most of His life. Do you think He wasn't ministering then?** Of course, it was more subtle, but how could you not be influenced by the way He spoke with you and did His work? That is our example. Do all to the glory of God as a bondservant of Christ and people will be influenced (Colossians 3:24^{xxiii}). Just this last week, someone told me the effect that Mariko and I had on their life. I had no idea. I'm just bumbling along trying to do God's will and too often falling short. But God takes our willingness and the desire in our hearts and does more than we realize, some of which we will only hear about in heaven.

²³ You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. 1 Corinthians 7:23 He repeats what he said in chapter six verse twenty^{xxiv}, and when the Bible repeats something we need to pay special attention to it. The first use was that the body belongs to the Lord regarding sexual purity, and now he is saying that the body belongs to the Lord for physical service. Jesus' blood was the payment that freed us from slavery to selfish demands so that we could be free to serve Him (John 8:36^{xxv}).

I think that this also applies to financial debt for Proverbs 22:7^{xxvi} tells us the borrower is slave to the lender. When we spend beyond our means, we are trying to serve two masters, between our personal desires and God. Jesus said we can't do both (Matthew 6:24^{xxvii}).

It seems Paul is saying more than to not sell yourself into slavery. That would go without saying. In addition to avoiding debt, I think it implies not being unquestioningly obedient to any man. In that culture, having an influential sponsor could elevate your status in society, but it could come with implied personal compromises. When we give up our spiritual discipline and discernment by following whatever one individual might say, we are being spiritually lazy. Cults gather followers because it is easier to rely on someone else's relationship with God than having our own. A set of rules or instructions are easier than a continual walk with God correcting and directing our lives. Don't be anyone's slave because you belong to God!

I am not my own. This is a mindset that is difficult for us to take hold of. Yes, God has given us freedom and will let us do what we want, but at the same time, He purchased us when He paid our sin debt (Colossians 2:14^{xxviii}). What kind of a life should we be living when we realize this? Should we just act on our whims? Shouldn't we be checking with God, our Master, before we act? I find He is incredibly gracious and generous, so much so that I forget to check with Him before decisions. We do that to our own loss. His will is always best for us in the long run.

²⁴ So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God. 1 Corinthians 7:24 Paul is repeating what he said at the beginning of this section and in verse 20. You don't need to change your occupation when you come to Christ

unless it is incompatible with the Christian life. We should remain in it with God now directing us. Learn to serve God where you are until He calls you elsewhere.

For a long time, I have dreamed of having Christians in every field of work in Sedona. People come here looking for answers or spiritual insight. We have what they are looking for! Amen? I imagine them booking a room and their host is a believer. There is a devotional in their bedroom. At breakfast there is something said about the Lord.

Then they go to their jeep tour, and their driver is a Christian. They ask about the red rocks, and he gives them the company answer, but then he gives them the Christian answer. The conversation gets a little deeper. They go to lunch and waitress is a believer. They ask her about vortexes and briefly she shares her testimony about how she came for the vortexes and ended up finding Jesus.

Next, they go uptown to shop and what do you know, the clerk starts up a conversation with them. He finds out that they are spiritually seeking and so he invites them to Jesus in the House, or the Sunday service. They attend and are touched by the Holy Spirit, and they fill out a prayer card and ... well you get the idea. Jesus is following them around town inviting them to Himself.

Notice our last verse ends “let him remain – with God.” Whatever your conditions or employment when you came to Christ, the important thing is that you remain with God. He is the One who makes all the difference. For both Moses and Joshua and others in the Old and New Testaments, the most encouraging word from the Lord was, “I will be with you” (Genesis 26:3^{xxxix}; Exodus 3:12^{xxx}; Joshua 1:5^{xxxi}; Acts 18:10^{xxxii}). I know some of you are in environments where the Lord is not honored. His name is used as a swear word. You are seen as a little strange when you don’t join in on the crude jokes. But that is exactly where you need to be. That is where the light of Christ needs to shine. God is with you. He promised to never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5^{xxxiii}).

I think most of us as believers think how nice it would be to work with Christians and live in a Christian community and not have to deal with worldly people. But we forget that we live in a spiritual war (Ephesians 6:12,13^{xxxiv}). If we want to glorify God and lay up our treasures in heaven, we will want to be in the heat of the battle (1 Samuel 17:32^{xxxv}). We will want to be a light in the darkness. We want the thrilling joy of knowing Jesus has touched others through our lives (Philippians 4:1^{xxxvi}). We are called to fellowship with God, to serve our Lord Jesus, and to be a witness to mankind. Let us pray that God will help us be willing and faithful for His glory.

Questions:

- 1 Why does Paul use “each” twice in verse 17?
- 2 What does Paul mean by “call” and “called”?
- 3 Why should we remain in the place we were called?
- 4 Review the quote about Luther’s understanding of this passage.
- 5 What really counts? What doesn’t count?
- 6 What does Paul mean by “commandments of God”? How do you know?
- 7 What can Christian slaves teach us?
- 8 At what stage in Jesus’ life did He minister?
- 9 Who owns you? What should be the results?
- 10 What does “with God” in the last verse say to us?

ⁱ **Acts 17:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

ⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)**

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

ⁱⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 12:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

^{iv} **2 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

^v **Titus 2:12 (ESV)**

¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,

^{vi} **1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

^{vii} **Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

^{viii} **Galatians 5:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

^{ix} Steven Um, Preaching the Word - 1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross, pgs. 136-137

^x **Genesis 17:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

^{xi} **Colossians 1:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

^{xii} **Romans 5:1 (ESV)**

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

^{xiii} **Ephesians 2:14-16 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

^{xiv} **Mark 12:33 (ESV)**

³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

^{xv} **Mark 16:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

^{xvi} **Galatians 5:6 (ESV)**

⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

^{xvii} **Romans 10:4 (ESV)**

⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

^{xviii} **Ephesians 6:5-7 (ESV)**

⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,

⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,

^{xix} **John 8:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

^{xx} **John 14:21 (ESV)**

²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

^{xxi} **1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)**

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

^{xxii} **2 Corinthians 5:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

^{xxiii} **Colossians 3:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

^{xxiv} **1 Corinthians 6:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

^{xxv} **John 8:36 (ESV)**

³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

^{xxvi} **Proverbs 22:7 (ESV)**

⁷ The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.

^{xxvii} **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

^{xxviii} **Colossians 2:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

^{xxix} **Genesis 26:3 (ESV)**

³ Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.

^{xxx} **Exodus 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

^{xxxi} **Joshua 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.

^{xxxii} **Acts 18:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."

^{xxxiii} **Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

^{xxxiv} **Ephesians 6:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

^{xxxv} **1 Samuel 17:32 (ESV)**

³² And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

^{xxxvi} **Philippians 4:1 (ESV)**

¹ Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.