

FOCUS TEXTS

1 Corinthians 7:20 (ESV)

Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.

OUR CONTENTMENT AMID VARIOUS EXPECTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

[Statement]

The believers in Corinth wrote a letter to Paul, asking him various questions (1 Corinthians 7:1).

Many of these people had recently come out of paganism and had converted to Christianity. They were new Christians.

Now they needed guidance when it came to matters such as marriage, divorce, sexual aspects of relationships, and one's status in life.

The Corinthians wondered, for example:

- Is it right for a Christian to be married at all? Wouldn't it be better to remain celibate - after all, Paul himself is unmarried?
- If a man becomes a Christian, should he divorce his unbelieving wife? And vice versa: should a believing wife divorce her pagan husband?
- There were also questions about circumcision: if you were uncircumcised when you became a Christian, should you now be circumcised? And if you were already circumcised and then converted, what should you do?
- And then there were questions about one's status in society - how should you navigate being a slave and becoming a believer? Should a Christian be concerned that as a slave, they don't enjoy the same

privileges as a free person... and that they are bound to an earthly master while Jesus is actually their Master!

From these questions, you can sense that the Corinthian community understood how deeply their faith in Jesus Christ impacted their lives.

They understood that their Christianity affected every aspect of their lives. There was a zeal and fire ignited within the hearts of these people!

This is, of course, good and beautiful, but perhaps there were also various expectations of what they thought a Christian should be. Standards they set for themselves and things they felt they should achieve as Christians.

In our text, the apostle provides answers to these questions and expectations of the community.

And three times he repeats the general principle; the basic rule:

"Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called."
(v.20)

[Application]

We sometimes have these high expectations as Christians too.

You look at the type of work you do, your marriage, your social status in society... and you wonder: is it all sufficient for me as a Christian? Is it good enough?

Well, today the Holy Spirit gives us the answer. He gives us the principle of contentment in Christ.

And it is this contentment in Christ that we must hear and understand today.

...Contentment actually stands in opposition to ambition...

1. CONTENTMENT AND AMBITIOUS EXPECTATIONS

[Statement]

Ambition is essentially the expectation and desire to be or do something more. There is an ideal that you want to achieve.

But listen to how "unambitious" Paul is when he writes to the Corinthians:

" Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called."
(v.20)

He even says to Christian slaves:

" Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) "
(v.21)

Where is the ambition, Paul!? Where are the ideals that Christians should strive for?! Where are the expectations that we, as Christians, should surpass?!

It's not as if the Bible says we should be lazy or hide away. The Lord wants us to work hard as if we are working for Him and not for people (Colossians 3:23,24).

He wants us to plan ahead, to be proactive, and entrust our plans to Him (Proverbs 16:3). Call it a God-focused ambition.

But the ambition that you and I often have and the expectations that the world often cherishes are different from the Biblical type of ambition!

Our ambition is often self-focused. It is a selfish ambition that focuses on my ideals that I want to achieve, my improvement, and advancement. Me, me, me.

The world praises such an ambitious person. Everyone around us sees ambition as a positive characteristic of a driven and dynamic individual!

Even we as Christians would expect Paul to say to the Corinthian community:

'Now that you are Christians, you should strive to be the best you can be! If you are a slave, you should do everything you can to gain your freedom! And your marital relationships should be more romantic than anyone else's. You should have beautifully exemplary relationships! And as Christians, make sure you always strive to be the best and perform well in everything you do!'

But, of course, Paul doesn't say that.

The principle that the apostle teaches us is that if we want to strive for something, we should strive for contentment!

Contentment stands in opposition to selfish ambition.

[Application]

Contentment in our circumstances is the principle that you and I may learn from the Holy Spirit today.

If you are a Christian who is a truck driver, you may feel that there are expectations weighing on you, that your profession is not good enough for God.

You may feel that you don't have enough ambition for the Lord. Your life will only be good enough, and you will only be able to truly serve the Lord if you become a missionary in Ukraine.

Perhaps that's true, that the Lord is calling you to be a missionary. But maybe He is calling you to be a Christian truck driver instead!

Be calm, be content, be satisfied in your circumstances.

Seek opportunities to serve God in the circumstances where you work as a truck driver!

Now, if, for example, you led an immoral lifestyle or had an immoral profession when you converted, then you should obviously change those things. Those things should not remain the same!

As a Christian, you can no longer continue to live as a thief, or a drunkard, or an adulterer. There must be repentance.

But for the rest, the principle applies:

"Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called."
(v.20)

There should be less ambition and more contentment among Christians.
Don't be lazy. Work hard, but find contentment in what the Lord has determined for you in this stage.

Now, how can I achieve this?

...Well, we can be content when we understand that we are called by God Himself...

2. CONTENTMENT IN MY CALLING

[Statement]

*" Each one should remain in the condition **in which he was called.**" (v.20)*

Let us first understand what Paul means when he says we are "called" by God.

Called here means that you have come to conversion. The moment when your life changed and you began to believe in Christ.

You are called, from darkness to light. You are called out of the spiritual grave to rise up and live with Christ.

The Good Shepherd calls, and His sheep listen and follow Him.

"Calling" has other nuances in Scripture, but here the specific idea is that as a Christian, you have been called out of death, sin, and the world to live under the authority of Christ.

To be called by God means that you have been called by name to serve God.

It is this calling of God that ultimately determines who I am at the end of the day. It is my entire identity! It determines my worth!

- It is not the things I do that make me good enough for God.
- It is not my social status that determines my standing before God.
- I don't have to practice a certain profession to be acceptable to God.

No! I can be acceptable to God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! It is through the rebirth of His Holy Spirit that He anoints me as a priest in His house!

What I was in the past has now been washed away by Christ, and I am forgiven! Now I am called by God!

Listen to how Paul puts it in another place in the Bible:

"nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And **such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.** (1 Corinthians 6:10-11)

This is what happens when God calls you! You are no longer who you were. You are sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus by the Spirit of God.

When this truth sinks deep within a person, then you can find contentment in your circumstances.

And the principle that the apostle Paul teaches us in our text is that you are called to serve God with contentment in your current situation, work conditions, and social standing and status.

The fact that God called me means that I am now good enough for God in Christ.

Because I am in Christ, the Lord is pleased with me, and that is how I can find contentment in my life circumstances.

The Lord's calling brings deep contentment to the heart of a Christian!

[Application]

You and I must first understand that we are called by God; otherwise, we will always feel that we have to do more to be acceptable to God.

We must understand that we are called, for that is the only way we can serve the Lord with contentment in the circumstances in which we currently live.

Did you become a Christian when you were already married? Then remain married. (If you want to know more about this, you can read the apostle's special instructions for these marital situations in 1 Corinthians 10:10-16).

Were you unmarried when you came to conversion? Then you may also remain unmarried and celibate. Being a Christian doesn't mean you have to be married.

Were you baptized in the name of the Triune God as a child, but you came to conversion much later? Then you don't need to be baptized again.

Perhaps the Lord called you in exceptionally difficult social and societal circumstances, such as being a slave in Biblical times. Even then, you can serve the Lord in your current circumstances...

...Because we must not think that we can only serve the Lord once our circumstances have improved.

CONCLUSION

[Application]

The fact that the Lord has called us means that in this week, we can find ways to serve the Lord where we live and work.

Sometimes, as Christians, we have these high and ambitious expectations:

You look at the type of work you do, your marriage, your social status in society... and you wonder: is it all sufficient for me as a Christian? Is it good enough?

May the Lord bring you tranquillity today. A contentment. Deep satisfaction to simply serve the Lord in the life circumstances in which He has called you!

AMEN!