

1 Corinthians 7:17 – 35

Reflections on Purpose, Mission, and Work

^{7:17}And don't be wishing you were someplace else or with someone else. Where you are right now is God's place for you. Live and obey and love and believe right there. God, not your marital status, defines your life. Don't think I'm being harder on you than on the others. I give this same counsel in all the churches. ¹⁸Were you Jewish at the time God called you? Don't try to remove the evidence. Were you non-Jewish at the time of your call? Don't become a Jew. ¹⁹Being Jewish isn't the point. The really important thing is obeying God's call, following his commands. ²⁰Stay where you were when God called your name. ²¹Were you a slave? Slavery is no roadblock to obeying and believing. I don't mean you're stuck and can't leave. If you have a chance at freedom, go ahead and take it. ²²I'm simply trying to point out that under your new Master you're going to experience a marvelous freedom you would never have dreamed of. On the other hand, if you were free when Christ called you, you'll experience a delightful 'enslavement to God' you would never have dreamed of. ²³All of you, slave and free both, were once held hostage in a sinful society. Then a huge sum was paid out for your ransom. So please don't, out of old habit, slip back into being or doing what everyone else tells you. ²⁴Friends, stay where you were called to be. God is there. Hold the high ground with him at your side. ²⁵The Master did not give explicit direction regarding virgins, but as one much experienced in the mercy of the Master and loyal to him all the way, you can trust my counsel. ²⁶Because of the current pressures on us from all sides, I think it would probably be best to stay just as you are. ²⁷Are you married? Stay married. Are you unmarried? Don't get married. ²⁸But there's certainly no sin in getting married, whether you're a virgin or not. All I am saying is that when you marry, you take on additional stress in an already stressful time, and I want to spare you if possible. ²⁹I do want to point out, friends, that time is of the essence. There is no time to waste, so don't complicate your lives unnecessarily. Keep it simple – in marriage, ³⁰grief, joy, whatever. Even in ordinary things – your daily routines of shopping, and so on. ³¹Deal as sparingly as possible with the things the world thrusts on you. This world as you see it is on its way out. ³²I want you to live as free of complications as possible. When you're unmarried, you're free to concentrate on simply pleasing the Master. ³³Marriage involves you in all the nuts and bolts of domestic life and in wanting to please your spouse, ³⁴leading to so many more demands on your attention. The time and energy that married people spend on caring for and nurturing each other, the unmarried can spend in becoming whole and holy instruments of God. ³⁵I'm trying to be helpful and make it as easy as possible for you, not make things harder. All I want is for you to be able to develop a way of life in which you can spend plenty of time together with the Master without a lot of distractions.

Questions

1. Sometimes we ask God what His will is for us, assuming that it *primarily* means what major to choose, who to marry, and what job to take. How is God's will actually larger than that?
2. It seems like Paul says two things at the same time: you can make a life change and you can stay put. (A note regarding slavery: a slave probably had more discretionary time and energy than a free person who has to work really hard for a living, like in a modern family small business.) What reasons does Paul give for his advice?
 - a. Going from singleness to marriage
 - b. Going from being a free person to being a slave (done for social advancement¹)
 - c. Going from being a slave to being a free person
3. Social advancement is not a priority to Paul. Of course, we do have human relationships, but what does 'time together with the Master without a lot of distractions' (v.35) mean about ambition and about our flexibility in life?

¹ 'In Roman Italy of the first century BC, it was evidently possible for the slave to achieve individual distinction despite his lowly origins and to be happily received into the free, civic community.' (Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, Cambridge:1994, p.1)

Reflections on Purpose – 1 Corinthians 15:58 – 16:18

^{15:58}With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into **the work of the Master**, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort. ^{16:1}Regarding the relief offering for poor Christians [the Jewish Christians hit by a famine in Palestine] that is being collected, you get the same instructions I gave the churches in Galatia. ²Every Sunday each of you make an offering and put it in safekeeping. Be as generous as you can. When I get there you'll have it ready, and I won't have to make a special appeal. ³Then after I arrive, I'll write letters authorizing whomever you delegate, and send them off to Jerusalem to deliver your gift. ⁴If you think it best that I go along, I'll be glad to travel with them. ⁵I plan to visit you after passing through northern Greece. I won't be staying long there, ⁶but maybe I can stay awhile with you – maybe even spend the winter? Then you could give me a good send-off, wherever I may be headed next. ⁷I don't want to just drop by in between other 'primary' destinations. I want a good, long, leisurely visit. If the Master agrees, we'll have it! ⁸For the present, I'm staying right here in Ephesus. ⁹A huge door of opportunity for good work has opened up here. (There is also mushrooming opposition.) ¹⁰If Timothy shows up, take good care of him. Make him feel completely at home among you. He works so hard for the Master, just as I do. ¹¹Don't let anyone disparage him. After a while, send him on to me with your blessing. Tell him I'm expecting him, and any friends he has with him. ¹²About our friend Apollos, I've done my best to get him to pay you a visit, but haven't talked him into it yet. He doesn't think this is the right time. But there will be a 'right time.' ¹³Keep your eyes open, hold tight to your convictions, give it all you've got, be resolute, ¹⁴and love without stopping. ¹⁵Would you do me a favor, friends, and give special recognition to the family of Stephanas? You know, they were among the first converts in Greece, and they've put themselves out, serving Christians ever since then. I want you to ¹⁶honor and look up to people like that: companions and workers who show us how to do it, giving us something to aspire to. ¹⁷I want you to know how delighted I am to have Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus here with me. They partially make up for your absence! ¹⁸They've refreshed me by keeping me in touch with you. Be proud that you have people like this among you.

1. Each of these activities are examples of 'the work of the Master.' Why are they important to Jesus?
 - (1) disaster relief / sharing wealth,
 - (2) evangelism, and
 - (3) ministry / service?
2. This passage fills out what Paul was talking about back in ch.7 as being eternally significant. How does this help shape our sense of purpose? How is it encouraging? Challenging?

Appendix A: In the Roman Empire, Free Men Became Slaves for Social Advancement

“Or what are we to think of free men who **voluntarily became slaves**, on one end of the scale, **in order to be eligible for an important administrative post**” [Andrea Giardina (ed), *The Romans*, University of Chicago Press:1993, p.168]

“**Some ambitious men did the same [sold themselves] in the hope of becoming the stewards of noblemen or imperial treasures.** This, in my view, was the story of the all-powerful and extremely wealthy Pallas, scion of a noble Arcadian family, who sold himself into slavery so that he might be taken on as steward by a woman of the imperial family and **who wound up as minister of finance** and *eminence grise* to the emperor Claudius.” [Paul Veyne (editor, translated by A. Goldhammer), *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, Belknap-Harvard: 1987, p.55]

“In Roman Italy of the first century BC, **it was evidently possible for the slave to achieve individual distinction despite his lowly origins and to be happily received into the free, civic community.**” [Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, Cambridge:1994, p.1]

“It was possible for such men, whether born into the imperial *familia* or recruited from outside, **to advance through what loosely resembled a career structure**, beginning with subordinate positions while still young and proceeding to positions of greater authority after manumission, which typically came when they were about thirty. For some, especially in the first century AD, **the way was open to participate directly in the highest levels of Roman government.**” [Slavery and Society at Rome, Keith Bradley, Cambridge:1994, p.69] **One captured slave from Smyrna** “served as a young administrator in the household of the emperor Tiberius, by whom he was set free. He accompanied Caligula when the emperor traveled north in AD 39 and was probably promoted to a provincial financial posting under Claudius and Nero before eventually becoming a *rationibus*, secretary in charge of the emperor’s accounts, under Vespasian. **Vespasian indeed conferred upon him the rank of *eques*, second only to that of senator** and his marriage, under Claudius, to a woman of free birth produced two sons who also gained equestrian standing.” [Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, Cambridge:1994, p.69ff.]

“These remarks imply that **it was perfectly possible at Rome for the socially inferior to win the esteem of their superiors and for the latter to draw the former firmly into society...**” [Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, Cambridge:1994, p.78]