

## 16. Learning to Accept Our Background

In our last topic, we saw that the Lord used Paul to give instructions about the way that a person who is a Christian is to minister to a partner that is not a Christian. The Corinthians had also asked Paul other questions about marriage. As a result, we will see in our topic today that Paul continues to answer questions about marriage and other related topics. Just as a person may become a Christian after marriage and have no background of Christianity, there are also many other backgrounds that a person may have at the time that a person becomes a Christian. For that reason, Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the importance of accepting the background that we had at the time that we became a Christian. We also want to help our children learn how to help others accept the background that they had before they placed their faith in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 7:17, we read, “But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.” The word that is translated “distributed” means *to divide or to distribute*. It points out the fact that God allows each of us to have a different background. God takes the things that have been a part of our background and uses them to help equip us for the unique ministry that the Lord has for each one of us. At the time we respond to the call of the Lord to salvation, certain things are true about our lives. In the previous verses, we saw that a person might be married and their partner is not a Christian at the time the person becomes a Christian. If that is true in the life of a person, that person begins their life in Christ with a partner that is not a Christian.

Paul pointed out the fact that each person is to accept the circumstances that are a part of their life at the time that they become a Christian. The word that is translated “walk” means *to make use of the opportunities or to conduct one’s life based on the circumstances that they have* in their life. At the moment we placed our trust in Christ, we were all given a new circumstance. Romans 8:4 says, “That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” The new circumstance is that we are now able to walk according to the Spirit instead of walking according to the flesh. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Here, we see that we are to walk in the good works which God has prepared for us by the circumstances that we have had in our lives.

In 1 Corinthians 7:18-19, we read, “Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters*.” Here, we see two possible backgrounds that a person might have. Abraham had been commanded to circumcise all of his descendants. As a result, all of the Jews were circumcised. This meant that circumcision was a part of the background of each Jew. In contrast, the Gentiles were usually not circumcised. Paul said that those who were circumcised were not to try to become uncircumcised and those who were uncircumcised were not to be circumcised.

Instead, Paul said that people were to realize that God had given them the background that they received to prepare them for a particular kind of ministry. Although both Peter and Paul were

Jews, they had grown up in very different circumstances. Peter had grown up among the Jews in Galilee. Paul had grown up among the Gentiles in Tarsus. God used the background of each to prepare them for the ministry to which the Lord called them. Galatians 2:7-8 says, “But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as *the gospel* for the circumcised *was* to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles).” Here, we see that God had allowed Peter and Paul to grow up in very different situations to prepare them for the ministry that the Lord had for each of them.

Paul said that whether a person was circumcised or uncircumcised was not even the key thing. Paul said that the thing that really matters is that we are obedient to the commandments that God has given us. Christ summarized those commandments in Matthew 22:37-40 and John 13:34-35. Matthew 22:37-40 says, “Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” John 13:34-35 says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” If we will love God with our whole heart, love our neighbor as we love ourselves and love one another as Christ has loved us, those commandments summarize the entire Bible.

Paul went on to point out a different type of circumstances in 1 Corinthians 7:20-22. Those verses say, “Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use *it*. For he who is called in the Lord *while* a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called *while* free is Christ's slave.” In the time of the New Testament, about one half of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves. In fact, slavery in that time meant that the master had the power of life and death over the slave. Many of the early Christians were slaves at the time they placed their faith in Christ. Those who became Christians that were slaves were not to be concerned about the fact that they were slaves. God could still give them a ministry as slaves.

If their master became a Christian and offered them freedom from their slavery, then they were to use that freedom to serve the Lord. Onesimus had been a slave of his master Philemon. Onesimus had stolen money from his master and had run away to Rome. There, he met Paul and became a Christian. Paul wrote to Philemon and said in Philemon 1:15-17, “For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose*, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave--a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you count me as a partner, receive him as *you would* me.” Since both Onesimus and Philemon were now Christians, Paul said that they had a new relationship to each other. They were beloved brothers in Christ. In fact, Paul encouraged Philemon to receive Onesimus as a full partner in ministry.

Paul said that those Christians who were slaves were actually the Lord's freedmen. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for

the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Then, Ephesians 6:5-7 says, “Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.” Paul pointed out that even a person that was a bondservant was to focus on doing the will of God from the heart.

In contrast, Paul said that those who had their freedom when they became Christians were actually to be Christ’s slaves. Romans 6:16-18 says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” If we are free, then we are to be the slaves of Christ and do the will of God from our hearts. We have been set free from sin so that we have the freedom to serve Christ and others in love.

We are next reminded in 1 Corinthians 7:23-24, “You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that *state* in which he was called.” In these verses, we see that we have been bought with a price. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.” Here, we see why we want to be able to help our children understand how to help others learn to accept the background that they have experienced.

The price that Christ paid to purchase our freedom from the bondage to sin was the blood of Christ. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” Since Christ paid such an expensive price to set us free from our sin, we do not want to become slaves again to the sins of people. Galatians 5:1 says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” That is why we are to remain in the state of spiritual freedom to which God has called us and not become entangled again in a yoke of bondage to sin. It is a great privilege to help both our physical and our spiritual children fully understand that when they placed their faith in Christ they were set free from the bondage of sin. We want to help them learn to live in that freedom. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to accept and minister from the background the Lord gave them.