

**SERMON MANUSCRIPT**  
**“God’s Call Changes Everything”**  
Saints Together | 1 Corinthians 7:8-24

Thanks, Jonathan. This week, we are still answering the question that was raised by the church in Corinth to Paul. The question being: “Is it good for a man to have sexual relations with a woman.” And for your reference, our initial focus will be on verses 17-24 and then we will come back to verses 8-16.

THE CALL OF GOD CHANGES EVERYTHING! 1) It changes the way we view our roles and our circumstances, 2) It changes where we find our identity, 3) It changes the way we view our singleness and our marriages.

THE CALL OF GOD CHANGES EVERYTHING.

Now, you might hear that and say “Really? Calling changes everything? Sounds like a churchy exaggeration to me.” Let’s walk through these texts and Let me show you how calling changes everything. Let’s consider, WHY and HOW this might impact the here and now of our lives and the lives of those around us right here in Austin, TX.

Let’s Pray.

WHY does God’s call change everything? Because it changes the way you view who you are. The definition of the word calling is probably the most important thing to understand before we go anywhere else. Paul uses the word call 8 times over the next several verses. So, let’s look at the word and jump off from there. Let’s start with what God’s calling is not. The use of the word “call”, in this case, is NOT our calling into something (ie. “I’m called to be at this job or that job”). Calling this case is NOT your role (ie. I am called to be a husband, graphic designer, salesperson, etc.) In v.17. we see the word “called” and it can be translated “to walk in”. The usage here is very specific and intentional. Let’s use this as our working definition for this morning. Calling means: To “Walk in” the light of God’s precious gift of the gospel wherever we are right now.” Let me say that again.

So, why communicate this type of calling and not the other? Paul is writing to the Corinthian church at a time when new Christians are walking away from their marriages, their vocations, and their friendships because their conversion out of paganism or Judaism. They are over correcting. Unfortunately, there view of “calling” is distorted. And Paul know this. So he decides to completely shift their paradigm. He’s seeking to put their “spirituality” into a radically different perspective by telling them the “call” of God is not about them or about their current situations. It’s about walking with Christ where they are right now. *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.* If you’re married then stay married. But don’t just stay married...“walk in” the light of the gospel as a married person. The same at your jobs. So we can see that God’s call isn’t changing what’s going on around us. God’s call is CHANGING US. It’s CHANGING ME. He’s changing us right where we are. He’s changing us even now.

Paul isn’t done though. He is also saying that our “call” is actually not about us. It changes us. But it’s not about us. Don’t abandon your commitments, Paul says. By walking away from our relationships and our jobs we aren’t honoring God! I remember throwing away non-christian CD’s as kid. What an idiot ☺ So, in short God, the Caller, has called you. You’re role at work hasn’t called you, your circumstances haven’t called you, your current situations haven’t called you. The Lord, YAHWEH has called you. And he knows the number of hairs on your head, every breath, in every detail he created you! This should CHANGE THE WAY YOU VIEW WHO YOU ARE!

So, we have the WHY. Now let’s look at HOW God’s call changes everything. Paul gives us two illustrations to work with starting in verse 18. *Was anyone at the time 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. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor un-circumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a*

*bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (but if you gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 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. **You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.***

He is saying, "If you're a Jew or Gentile, religious obligations mean nothing to God. If you're a slave, don't be concerned, because your significance is not in social status (no matter how good or bad that status may be)." Let me read this back to us how Paul might address us today, "Are you a faithful, Bible believing Christian who's trying show how great you are by what you do? Don't get caught up in that because "your works" mean nothing to God! Are you a young couple trying to find to snag a house in that neighborhood you can't afford so everyone can know you've arrived? Don't let your longing for status take the place of God and where He wants you to be!" And then Paul takes it even further in verse 23 by saying, "we are are bought at a price". In other words, we belong to Christ now. He has paid for our freedom and a way out of slavery. This would have been such a powerful illustration for the early church. He wants them to know it's NOT even about them anymore! It's about God. You now belong to Christ and your identity is NOT in status, religion, or the circumstances he has placed you in. Wherever you are, there God is too! Christ is in you. You are his child. Take his gospel and bring it to where you are in the here and now. I'd like to share my own story with you about my struggles with identity.

I used to be a part owner of company here in Austin. During my 4 years there circumstances changed a lot. Plenty of highs and plenty of lows. I loved the people I worked with. Loved being an entrepreneur. Frankly, it's where I placed my identity. I thought, if the company failed, then people would view me as a failure. If the company succeeded, then people would view me as a success. Worse than that... if the company failed, I would view myself as a failure.

Of course, I would tell all my Christian brothers and sisters that my identity was in Christ. I'd lead a City Group and tell others to find their identity in Christ. I'd sit and listen to sermon after sermon about how great it was that as a Christian you get to let go. Give it to Christ. Bu guess what, my identity wasn't in Christ. I was a faker. I'd say with my mouth, "My Identity is in Christ!" But it wasn't true. I didn't believe it either. By God's grace, and he always gives us grace. I'm now learning what it means to believe it. He is re-shaping my view of what I think my "calling" is. This reshaping is allowing me, in my new role as a pastor, to find my identity fully in Christ.

I was having lunch with my wife & parents a couple days ago. (*great little Chinese place Houston. If you're interested, find me after the service ☺*) I was telling them all the details of my new job and how different it was to be a pastor. The highs and lows. After I as done talking, my mom leans in and says, "God was telling you that you can't do it on your own. Your charm, wit, intelligence doesn't bring healing, reconciliation, or repentance. Only God, by the Spirit, brings that kind of change to people's lives." (GULP) If I could paraphrase what my mom was saying, "People don't need me. They need the power of God's Spirit that lives inside of me. Don't find your identity in work, Ian. Don't look for your identity in others, Ian. Find it in Christ, because it's not about you. It's about him and walking with others as you have been called to do." For some of you this story might resonate. Some of you are saying with your mouths, "My identity is in Christ!" But you don't believe it with your hearts. You've been in this church, part of a City Group, serving the poor. But you are finding identity somewhere else. We all do this. But it doesn't mean we shouldn't repent. If that's you, consider where you are currently placing your identity. Let God's Spirit show you, and maybe He is right now, where you need to let go of controlling your identity and find it in Jesus. OK. Let's quickly recap...

HOW: God's Call changes everything: Because we now belong to Christ and our identity is in Him.

WHY: God's Call Changes everything: Because it changes the way we view who we are.

These are incredibly important to understand because they shape our view of who God is and what place we are willing to give him in our daily lives.

*8-9 To the **unmarried** and the widows I say that it is good for them to **remain single** as I am. But if they cannot exercise control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to **burn with passion**.*

It may not be obvious on the surface, but in verse 8 Paul has said something very paradigm shifting. It would be considered radical to the cultural norm of his day. Now, as an Austinite you are all *very enlightneded* (joke) so you might not be shocked by what Paul says here. *To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am.* Here in the West we view family much differently than an Eastern Or Traditional culture might. In the West, we make a big deal out of our individual liberties and personal happiness. This is much different from a traditional culture's view of marriage. Where the family was everything! Individual liberty and personal happiness take a back seat. So if you weren't married then you would have been considered a nobody, you wouldn't have had a place in public society, and it's likely your family would have considered you an embarrassment or shame on your family. But Christianity, from Paul's perspective, says something different about the "unmarried" life. He holds it up as a viable option for adulthood.

Stanley Hauerwas, a prof. Emeritus of Divinity & Law at Duke University, in his essay called: Community of Character. Say this...

*"Christianity was the very first religion, or worldview, to uphold single adulthood as a viable way of life. One clear difference between Christianity and Judaism and all other religions of the day was that the former is an entertainer of the idea that being unmarried was a paradigm way of life for it's followers." In addition, he points out... "Tyberius Ceasar at one point decreed that any woman who was widowed must re-marry within two years."*

Can you imagine reading this letter as a widowed or unmarried person, particularly as a woman. Paul has just said something profound... You don't have to get married as a Christian. Why? It's not about being "married" or "unmarried". You have the ultimate social status in your new Christian family. A woman's value is seen as no different in God's eyes. In a traditional culture when we read in scripture that "widows were supported by the church in every way". It should be read (and would have been considered) radical. Well, Paul is single. So you might be thinking that Paul just doesn't like Marriage. Listen to verse 9... *But if they cannot exercise control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*

Paul is not putting singleness OVER marriage. He's advocating for not sinning, being a saint, being true to the one who has called you. In doing so there are two things to observe:

- 1.) He's saying, "Sex is for marriage"
- 2.) He's holding up self-control, which we see in Galatians 5 is fruit of having the Holy Spirit.

Let's look at the next couple verses. *10-11 To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.* OK. How archaic, right? Doesn't Paul know we live in an age of radical equality and individual freedom. But let's think about it. If equality and freedom are the moral compass/center then where does God fit into that? Then who am I? Who is Paul to tell you NOT to get divorced? Frankly, I'm nobody. And if you read enough about the Apostle Paul, you'll find out he considers himself a nobody too ☺ But God is everything! Let's pause for a moment because I don't want to assume we are all coming from the same place when we talk about subject matter like this.

[SLIDE 1] [SLIDE 2]

So you see, sex and marriage have everything to do with God. You should be asking yourself, "How can I best reflect that I am God's daughter or son with sex and in my marriage?" Not how can I get what I want in sex and in this relationship. It's important to address this because we have to have a basis to answer questions that come out of verses like the one we just read. He designed it, he created something beautiful and if you want to be in light of him live accordingly.

*7:12-16 To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such*

*cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*

Why would Paul ask a person to stay with someone who doesn't believe in Jesus? Doesn't the Bible talk about that? Remember: Men and women were coming to hear about Christ, know Christ, and know the church for the first time. Men & women, having been married at the time of conversion, are in relationships with unbelievers. Why would Paul ask a person to stay with someone who doesn't believe in Jesus?

Here's the fundamental reason: We don't leave these relationships is because they are made with God. In a paradigm of marriage where you are not under God. Then your commitment is to yourself. If that's the case then it's way too hard. None of us could do it. BUT your commitment is to God. He's a gracious God. He loves your unbelieving spouse too. He wants your spouse to see the grace, the mercy, the love, the change & transformation of who you are in Christ. If you're in this situation, let your City Group know, come down for prayer, know God is gracious! Ultimately, our God is a missional God. The best way for someone to see that you are a new creation in Christ is in your relationships.

We began this morning by saying, **THE CALL OF GOD CHANGES EVERYTHING**. It really does. Hopefully, we now see our call to serve God is not about us. It's about HIM. As we live in the here and now of our callings. What are we doing with the short time we've been given? Are we spending it on ourselves? Are we finding identity in things other than Christ? Later on in verse 29 Paul reminds us that "this life is short" Some have called it "a vapors breath." Wherever you go this week. Whatever you do. Remember God has called you to "walk in" the light of His gospel wherever you are. Let's Pray.