



Epiphany 3 B

ARTICLE NO. 2006.129

Epistle

Christ offers freedom - Come as you are.

[1 Corinthians 7:10-16] **1 Corinthians 7:17-23**



[10. And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. ^A (13.) For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?]

17. But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised.

Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.

Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men

^A Verses 10-12 are never read during the Sunday services, so they are added here together with 13-17 (Lent 3B), for introduction to Paul's message in 17-23.

Refs

Much of this tract is commentary - don't take it as Gospel. It is here to encourage meditation and study. Use your gift of discernment, to find the truth.

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Come as you are

Paul, at the time of this letter in A.D. 54, is vitally concerned with the sexual mores of his congregation in Corinth. In the previous chapter, he chastised the men for visiting the harlots in the Temple of Venus. At the start of this chapter 7, he tells them that if they can't suppress their desires, then they should be married even if the wife is an unbeliever. ^A Better to be married to an unbeliever than to be a fornicator for whom there is no hope of entering the Kingdom of God. And, he says, if the believer and the unbelieving wife have children their children are sanctified by God (holy) and so the wife has 'entry into the Kingdom' (my words) through the children and her believing husband (for the two are one - as Christ says). If the unbelieving partner leaves the marriage, then the remaining partner is free (to remarry).

But, in general, Paul says, don't make any changes to your marital status just for the sake of the 'Way'. And don't worry about your job or position in life being a hindrance to becoming a Christian. Christ says to 'come as you are, with whatever God has blessed you with'. If you are an adult Jew, you don't have to give up your covenant, and if you are a Jewish child, you don't have to take it on. As far as we Christians are concerned it doesn't matter whether you are a Jew or not, just keep the commandments of God.

Christ has already paid for your ultimate 'freedom'. You are now free to serve Christ, whether you are a servant (slave to a master), slave to a marriage, slave to sin, a free man now, or can obtain your freedom. It is Christ who has bought and paid for you, do not align yourselves with mere men^B.

^A The men outnumbered the women in the congregations so it was hard to even find a woman who was a believer, and the men were concerned that marrying outside the "Way" was going to cause problems.

^B There were other 'preachers' within the congregation and from abroad who were more eloquent, perhaps, than Paul, but who's gospel was different.

More Insight

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Paul is being very pragmatic with his converts in Corinth, and in so doing he disagrees with what has been Jesus's teachings on marriage. Whereas Jesus was plainly against divorce and remarriage, Paul is suggesting that this might be a practical solution if the marriage gets in the way (of salvation). Jesus also called his Apostles to leave work, family and friends and to follow Him, whereas Paul is telling the disciples to stay in their secular role, but to reform spiritually. Remember that the Parousia was expected imminently, so Paul was saying that there was no time to make any changes and it was not time to enjoy anything worldly, whether job, wife or possessions. There was only just enough time to prepare for the Lord's arrival, so all attention should be devoted to getting prepared.

Compare this with Jesus's instructions Luke 14:26

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

Additional Comments

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Commentary

JND CW 25.139

"If any [man] come to me" Multitudes were attracted by the hearing of such grace: so in verse 26 He tells them what discipleship will involve. There may be an allusion here to Mic 7:5,6. Friends must be given up for Christ. A man may have to leave everything else, but the question is, Am I to leave God? What! life too? Yes -- no matter. In that life you are linked with the world, and that must be given up too, if I am in question: you cannot have two hearts -- a heart for the world, and a heart for Me -- Christ would say. I tremble when I see people who have not counted the cost, setting out in the profession of following Christ. It is God's way to put the barrier at the first start. If you can leap that, you will do. Legal obedience will not stand, but following Christ. If He is in the path, it is happy and easy; but it is a path between two hedges. If Christ is not with you in it, there will be nothing but trouble and difficulty.

A disciple in 32 AD had to give away or sell off all that he owned, and live with others in a common building. The next two years of his life would be devoted to training under an Apostle (cf. Didache or Training of the Twelve Apostles), and memorizing the Gospel. His scripture was the Septuagint. His language Aramaic and Koine Greek. He would be taught how to live the 'way of Life', and to shun the 'way of death'. He was taught all of Jesus's teaching. Also the christian way of fasting, prayer, baptism, eucharist, conversions, justice, prophecy, eating, farming, and church administration.

After his training he would be let loose on the world to spread the Gospel, and would depend upon the generosity of his listeners for food and shelter. There was no contact with family during the two year 'apprenticeship'.

"If any [man] come to me" On the Lord's departure great multitudes go with Him, to whom He turns with the words, "If any man come to me, and shall not hate his own father, and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters; yea and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple." They might have thought that at any rate they would treat the Lord better than His message -- so little does man know of himself. The Lord would not permit that the multitude then following Him should flatter themselves that they at least were willing to partake of the supper, that they were incapable of treating God with the contempt described in the parable. So the Lord tells them what following Himself involves. The disciple must follow Christ so simply and decidedly that it would seem to other eyes a complete neglect of natural ties, and an indifference to the nearest and strongest claims of kin. Not that the Lord calls for want of affection; but so it might and must look to those who are left behind in His name. The attractive power of grace must be greater than all natural fetters, or any other claims of whatsoever kind, over him who would be His disciple.
WK E 248

"If any [man] come to me" After this the Lord turns to the multitude. As He had shown the hindrance on man's part to coming, so He gravely warns those that were following Him in great numbers, and says, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." The moral difficulties are most earnestly pressed upon those who were so ready to follow Him. Would it not be well and wise to sit down first and count the cost of building the tower completely? to consider

"If any [man] come to me" There follow, the world being such as all this shows it to be the conditions of discipleship. It is just when crowds are going with Him, and to these, that the Lord declares them. He had spoken in the same way before, but the repetition intensifies His utterance and shows its exceeding importance. He who comes to Him must hate (in comparison with Him) all nearest and dearest to him and his own life too. He must bear his cross and come after Him, or he cannot be His disciple.
FWG NB 5.420

Matthew 19:29

"29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Matthew 5:46

"46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?"

Matthew 10:34-37

"34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Luke 14:26, 27

"26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and **his own life also**, he cannot be my disciple.

27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

Luke 6:20-36

"20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.

Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

22 Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

"**yea, and his own life also**" Nothing is more testing than grace; it is much more testing than law. "His own life also" comes very close home. It involves a moral separation from all that would be naturally one's own life, which is not the system of grace that we have been compelled to come into. The Lord would teach us to draw a sharp line of distinction between heavenly grace, God's satisfaction in Christ which I enjoy by the Spirit, and the best thing in nature and one's own life viewed apart from that system of grace. I have to hate everything in myself that is apart from that system of grace. What is of the natural has a tendency to divert us and we have to watch it. That is just a simple fact, and most of us are old enough in the school of God to have learnt it.

God would impress on us the entirely new character of what He has brought us into by compelling us to come in; it is something as entirely apart from natural relationships as from sin. Many think of Christianity as liberating us from sin, but it has come in to liberate us from the best things in nature. A brother may be surrounded by every domestic joy and comfort, but in touching the things of God there is something much more precious to the heart, a deeper joy to be tasted, and if we are rightly exercised we must be careful lest even domestic happiness should divert us from the blessedness into which we have come. The Lord put it as a test, as much as to say, You have been pleased to hear what I have been saying, and you are crowding after Me, but do you understand that it means an entirely new life, not only apart from sin but apart from the natural life? There is always a tendency for the natural to hinder it, and therefore the natural has to be regarded with jealousy.
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Amori Christi et Ecclesiae –
Glen C. Miller OSV

The Views expressed here are strictly those of the author and probably disagree with what you have previously thought. Read other commentaries - meditate on the original KJV.

Advice to investigators:

Don't put off becoming a Christian because you feel constrained by your environment, obligations, the opinions of others etc. First believe, then be baptized, and every hindrance to salvation will be dissolved in the blood of Christ.

Recommended Books

ISBN

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary	Brown, Raymond	Prentice Hall	0-13-614934-0