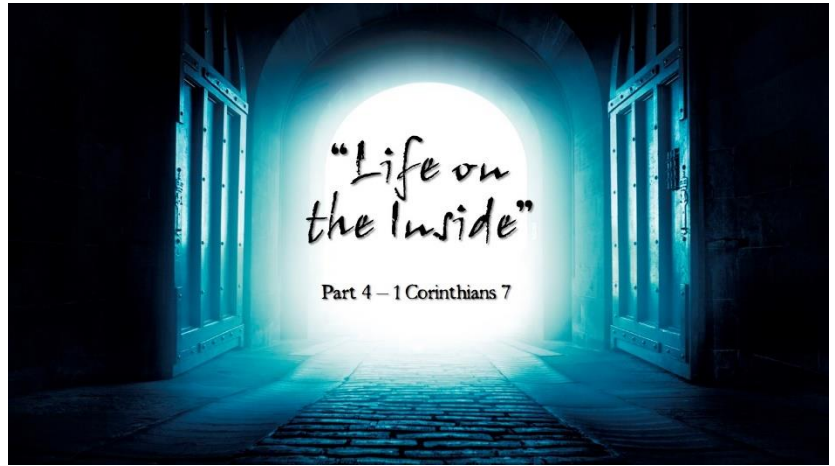


“Life on the Inside” – Part 4 **1 Corinthians 7:17-40**

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Chapter 7:17-40 *17 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. 18 Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. 20 Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. 21 Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. 22 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. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called. 25 Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. 26 I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that it is good for a man to remain as he is: 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. 29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, 30 those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, 31 and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away. 32 But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. 33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife. 34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband. 35 And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction. 36 But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. 37 Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. 38 So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better. 39 A wife is bound by law as long*

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The gospel...and moreover it's effects, are both radical and revolutionary. It completely changes both the invisible as well as the practical of a believers' living, both now and forever. Upon redemption for believers, it suddenly seems that anything and everything is possible. It was no different in Corinth in Paul's day. Because of the radical nature of the gospel, and this profound metamorphosis that was happening in believers' lives, some of the folks in Corinth had begun to effectively burn down the village ...to dramatically and completely plow under every personal attribute, relationship, and history in a sweeping attempt at reinventing themselves.

In the past few years as the Black Lives Matters movement gained momentum and the sexual identity revolution found a foothold, groups have gone around the country changing the names of schools and public institutions, tearing down monuments and unilaterally changing English vocabulary, all in an effort to reinvent themselves, erase the past and change the broader culture, and moreover to do so overnight. Who says we can't get that square peg into that round hole? All it takes is a little force!

The new Corinthian believers were moving to dramatically break their social ties, change their professions, and cut loose from their family and public obligations. While perhaps righteously motivated, that kind of drastic

upheaval, *of course*, disrupted the lives of all who surrounded the Corinthian believers, whether it was friend, family, or foe. Some of the Corinthian believers were just breaking loose from everything.

For example, some believers reasoned like this: if this world is sinful and corrupt, then a believer must have nothing to do with the world nor with those who live in this world. Therefore, some believers broke all their previous social ties. Others reasoned this way: if believers are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, then they should separate from their unbelieving spouses. Still others thought this: they needed to do away with all the rituals and duties of church, religion, and organized faith gatherings. After all, they were saved by faith and not by a church attendance or a religious motion!

Believer after believer was now questioning his lot in life and becoming dissatisfied, often feeling that he or she had been dealt a terrible hand in life. Therefore, the thinking was that he or she had to change his life, no matter who it affected or hurt. Again, some believers were changing their jobs, core religious beliefs, their friends; and some were even breaking up their wives and families in order to change their lot in life. Humanity is still attempting this desperate half court shot. And a lot of church folks are equally guilty of this “grab-the-bull-by-the-horns” kneejerk reaction which is effectively rather an attempt to put Jesus in a “holy headlock” to force a life trajectory of our own making.

Firstly, we must see that God calls people from all lots in life, from all conditions and levels of society. Economic distinctions do not matter, vocations and social conditions do not matter. What matters is whether you are faithful, in whatever lot in life you find yourself in. One need only look at the biblical record to see that God used the whole social, economic and educational spectrum for His plans and glory. God is never limited. He used uneducated fishermen from the bottom of the social/economic barrel to kings and rulers of nations and everything in between. There is no place in Christianity for a cookie-cutter model wherein we all dress the same, think the same, speak the same, and vote the same. If such were the goal, we would lose all the richness of the body of Christ, wherein we are called to each take his or her place to be a unique community made up of a plethora of gifts, talents and personalities.

God has given each one of us special gifts through the indwelling Holy Spirit. In those gifts we are to walk. We are to move, act, and serve with the gifts God has given us. For such service is not optional, but rather a critical and innate movement of the church and those within it.

Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Paul says all of this is “ordained.” The word **ordained** speaks of giving a command or an order. Paul seemed to be prophetic in his edict. It was as if he truly understood the hearts of mankind and their tendency to forever remain in the *receiving* position before God, and not give anything back to Christ for what He has done for us. We are so often ready to receive Jesus as Savior, but painfully reluctant to let Him be Lord of our lives. And why should I? I have plans and dreams after all!

We generally fail to grasp the fact that by becoming a Christian we are joining a nation at war, and one thing is for sure, *we aren't the general!* To sit on the sidelines is not only dangerous and counterproductive, but it is also shameful, and ultimately manifests our hearts of disbelief and our selfish, self-centered spirits. He has known us...he has “formed us,” before we were even born, for a unique and critical aspect of the body life.

Psalms 139:13-16 *You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous — how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was*

woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

You must realize that God has been messing about in your life long before you ever came to Him. He knew you were coming and in His grace He prepared the way before you. He desires that you exercise that for which you were created. Indeed, the exercise of our gifts is not to be contrived and forced. We are not to respond to constraint or back-door legalism. Our service to God is to come from an overflowing spirit. It is to be a reflection of our love, our commitment, and our loyalty. Therefore if we are *not* seeking to serve Him...right where we stand today, one must question the authenticity of that conversion. Because no one goes through such a serious transformation as salvation and fails to come out the other side profoundly different and profoundly motivated.

And yet, many of us, upon receiving Christ, have come to feel a need to immediately and dramatically change our external circumstances overnight. And often our heart is righteous toward this matter, yet we fail to grasp the fact that real and lasting change travels from the inside to the outside. If we change the outside firstly, or God help us *only*, we will inevitably fall. Even if we did manage to succeed on some level, it would not be honest and we not be reflecting the glory of Christ, but rather the self-glory of our flesh. Without fail, our faith will be short-lived, and our “Christian experiment” will come to an end. It *has* to. Because if we could manage such a transformation and living dynamic, then Jesus died for nothing! Certainly, our internal transformation will change our outward lives. But our external efforts to be someone else will have little, if any, lasting effect on who we really are.

Paul seems to be discouraging us from making these dramatic changes to our outward being upon rebirth. As a child again, we must take time to see what and who God wants us to be. It will take time to grow into our new skin. The old skin, with all of its worldly marks, scars and colors, doesn't matter anymore.

2Co 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Outward appearances mean little, if anything, in the eyes of God. You can dress like you think a Christian ought to dress, cut your hair, get rid of your tattoos, and take out your piercings. But you are still the person you are inside, and that person is going to come forth, one way or another.

(7:20)

This verse does not mean there are not some immediate changes called for upon salvation. Sometimes we are living in sinful, or even dangerous situations and some fast action is needed. But outside of the obvious, God, speaking through the apostle Paul, is directing us to hang tight, and allow the Spirit to direct you and your brothers and sisters to speak into your life.

One must know that before the foundations of the earth were laid, God knew when and how we were coming to Him. With such in mind, He has created a broad and complete body of Christ. Each one of us takes our place in a beautiful mosaic of characters and gifts, reaching people that another could not reach, and serving in ways others could not.

(7:21-22)

Paul's words are not meant to prohibit individual change and betterment. He is not mandating stagnation and isolationism. A better job, more education, etc, is not prohibited here. We know, however, that anything like this should be so we might please the Lord and serve Him in a greater way, not just for an easier job or more money! All we are and all we do is to be for Christ and His kingdom. Our lives should not be as the unredeemed, caught up in the earthly struggle for money, a career, prominence, comfort, and the “American Dream.”

We can often struggle and strive through life because we seek to be Christians *and* still pursue our own worldly path. It cannot ever be done successfully, any more than you can jump out of a plane, change your mind, and get back on board. Real rebirth is a “no turning back” commitment. And our calling...our place in the body that we were created for, is as concrete as our very salvation. This is the reason we have so many frustrated and unhappy believers. They are trying to be Christians, while still retaining control of their lives. Those who have abandoned their calling ...*without fail*, ultimately end up the most miserable of people...

(7:23-24)

We have been bought at a price, and it was a steep price at that. It cost Christ His very life, which came through a terribly painful death. We are owned by the Creator of the Universe, and He does not intend to share us. We belong to God. He is to direct our lives and our very destiny. Consider that for a moment...how are you treating...how are you dealing with the life loan that you have? Because as a Christian...*if you truly are one*, that life is not yours anymore. It's all His...

(7:25-28)

Again Christ was silent on the specifics of this issue. Yet Paul gives his personal direction, which I take as good counsel from a trustworthy source. But let's face it...as if to give a period at the end of the sentence for all that he has said over the past verses, he takes a controversial and perhaps even radical position: he says that for those who are seeking marriage, that because of the battles of this world and especially for those who are believers, we would be better off to remain single. This is hardly a popular notion today, where getting married has become an American “right” and a mandatory passage into adulthood.

But for those who are already married, they should remain married ...to “hold the course” and those who are single to prayerfully consider remaining single. Yet he goes on to state clearly that getting married is not a sin. God decreed: “It is not good that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). The writer of Hebrews, likely Paul himself, said, “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled.” Paul elsewhere speaks of those who forbid to marry as being a sign of latter-day apostasy (1 Tim. 4:1–3).

But let us acknowledge that he goes on to state a truth that most people don't want to acknowledge, and want even less to consider. We want to believe marriage will be a constant bliss, but in truth, it has a reality of trouble of its own.

(7:29-31)

Verses 29 - 31 completely shred the modern principle of “family first” in a person's life. Paul takes the brave but no doubt unpopular position here, placing God and pursuit of the kingdom first.

There is a large segment of the church-going population that wants to fix up this world and get it ready for Jesus to come and rule over it. But those people totally ignore this passage and many others. This world is passing away and we, as Christians, need to be investing in something better than this mess. The Bible says we will have a new earth. Not that we should fix up this one. Few passages in scripture are so poignant as to how we should be living as sojourners on this earth.

Matt 24:37-39 *“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”*

(7:32-33)

Paul desires that all believers live a life without earthly care, but when we look around today, we see so many people who claim to be born again believers and are stressed to the max. They are worried about everything,

running to and fro, trying to manage the life they have personally built, which is larger than they need or can handle. This is not the life on this planet God desires for us.

2 Thess 3:12 *“Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.”*

Again, while Paul is not saying marriage is any kind of a sin, marriage and a subsequent family will not simplify your life, but will complicate things. We are being called to not allow the things of this world -*our possessions, time-restraints, and worldly pursuits* -to consume us to the point where we cannot serve God and give to His work. Most of us think about someone else we know when it comes to this matter, and are very slow to analyze our *own* lives. We are apt to feel however that we are special...*our* stuff is more important, and that *our* time-consuming idols are critical to our survival. We all are quite reluctant to sacrifice our *own* idols!

(7:34-38)

Paul reiterates that he is in no way trying to put a leash on them, rather he is warning them as brothers and sisters that family will complicate their lives. *Anything* we add to our world besides our God can make things harder for us. This is the case no matter how earthly good that such additions may seem.

In this text, Paul could be referring to a man himself marrying, or to a man's support or lack of support for his son or daughter marrying. (The word virgin used here refers to male or female.) Either way, Paul is in no way forbidding marriage, but still gives a warning.

(7:39-40)

Finally, Paul ends this section by stressing that if you are married, it is a binding relationship. Once married, scripture has a whole other teaching on the duties and joys of married life. Paul states for the record that if the marital partner dies, the individual is free to remarry. But “only in the Lord,” meaning by His direction and providence, and only within the clear guidelines of scripture.

Paul has been willing to deal with the difficult and even *unpopular* issues that are part of the life of the faithful. So much of Paul's teaching revolves around the issue of serving God and how one may do that best. He was always trying to pass on the whole dynamic of the Christian life, not just the blessing of grace, but the cost of discipleship too. You cannot have one without the other.

Heb 12:1 *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”*