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Sermon Notes

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Bloom Where You're Planted, Content in Every Condition

1 Corinthians 7:17-28

This amazing section of scripture speaks powerfully to a life of contentment in your present circumstances...

Here I want to lift up to you a hidden jewel in the teaching...

I. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

A. Paul Addresses Various Marital Status in the Church

1. He had been addressing sexual immorality at multiple levels
 - a. 1 Corinthians 5: a church discipline case in which a man was sinning sexually with his father's wife
 - b. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: fornicators, adulterers, the effeminate, and homosexuals
 - c. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20: Paul addresses the sexual immorality of church members frequenting temple prostitutes
 - d. 1 Corinthians 7:1 Paul addresses people who on the other hand are super-spiritual and think it would be best for men and women never to touch each other sexually at all; in verses 2-7, Paul answers that some people are gifted to abstain—those with the gift of singleness; for the rest, there is godly Christian marriage—one man, one woman, in covenant marriage for life, coming together regularly in God's ordained pattern
 - e. 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, he addresses single people and widows, and makes a pitch for remaining single, if people are self-controlled
 - f. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, he urges married people to stay married, and not get divorced
 - g. 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, he addresses Christians married to non-Christians...
2. In the midst of this practical advice about how to live a healthy, God-honoring life sexually, Paul gives a central lesson

1 Corinthians 7:17 Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

3. Paul will go through various life situations, and apply this same lesson
 - a. Vs. 18: To the circumcised... stay circumcised; to the uncircumcised, stay uncircumcised... then this lesson again

1 Corinthians 7:20 Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him.

- b. Vs. 21-23: to the slaves... **don't let your life circumstance trouble you...** you are really Christ's slave... but if you can get your freedom, do it...
BUT

1 Corinthians 7:24 Brothers, each person should remain with God in whatever situation he was called.

- c. In verses 25-28, he then returns home to the topic of the chapter... marital status; he basically addresses virgins... single people who have never been married
- d. The advice he gives is generally to stay where you are... don't be pining and yearning to change your circumstances; and he begins to advocate the single life
- e. consistent lesson

1 Corinthians 7:26 Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are.

B. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

1. Though Paul never uses the word "content" or "contentment", that is the basic perspective he is using in all these life circumstances
2. Let me state what Christian contentment is, and then show how it applied to this chapter
3. What is contentment??
 - a. The common use of the word "contentment" is a mental/emotional state of peace and happiness
 - b. Worldly contentment is totally based on favorable circumstances
 - i) Your senses are sated... like a group of people laying around after a large satisfying feast, like Thanksgiving

- ii) Or a sports fan going to bed hours after their team has won the championship, lying in bed reliving the moments of the game... happy and peaceful
 - iii) Or a young married couple on their honeymoon, sitting side by side on a beach, cuddling and looking at a spectacular sunset over the waters of the Caribbean
 - iv) Or a law school graduate who hours ago found out he got placed at the most prestigious law firm in the country; the adrenaline has worn off, but the lawyer walks across the campus of his university glowing inside...
 - v) Or a baby who nestles on her mommy, all needs met, warm and bundled, safe and secure, she falls asleep
 - vi) Those are all pictures of normal, earthly contentment
- c. But Christian contentment is based on invisible realities, on the future promises of God and the presence of God's Spirit
4. Paul PRACTICED WHAT HE PREACHED when it came to supernatural contentment; Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail
- a. They had been publicly arrested, stripped, beaten, humiliated, dragged to jail and put in the deepest, darkest part of the jail with their feet in stocks
 - b. Their earthly condition couldn't have been much worse: humiliated publicly, thrown in jail; backs bleeding, feet in stocks; hungry, thirsty, smelling stench, hearing curses and bitter complaints from other prisoners
 - c. Their immediate prospects were terrifyingly uncertain... possibly executed the next day! YET...

Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

This is one of the greatest moments in church history... the purest display of the supernatural power of Christ to give hope in the worst possible circumstances

God was so moved by their courage and faith that he sent an earthquake that loosened everyone's chains and opened the doors... but no one escaped

The Philippian jailer and his family were saved that night...

Paul consistently displayed this kind of contentment... even in the midst of a terrifying storm that ended in a shipwreck

5. Paul's magnificent teaching on contentment... Philippians 4

Philippians 4:11-13 I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

- a. The word he uses for "content" is literally "self-sufficient"; he does not mean apart from God; not at all! The Christian life is one of total and continual dependence on God and on Christ... like the VINE and the BRANCHES
 - b. So, when Paul says he's learned to be "self-sufficient," he really means "God-sufficient"... and when it comes to the physical realm, if we have God and Christ, we need NOTHING ELSE
 - c. Christ is enough for Paul... he would say, "I don't need food or drink, because if I die, I will depart and be with Christ, which is better by far!" I don't need my freedom, for I have true freedom in Christ!" I don't need to be esteemed by any human audience, for if Christ is pleased with me, nothing else matters
 - d. That's the language of Christian contentment... I don't really need ANYTHING in the creature realm... although created things can bring me relief or pleasure
6. Paul says he's "learned the secret" of being content in any and every situation; So, Christian contentment is **possible**, but not **guaranteed**
7. The secret is applied to actual life circumstances
- a. "well-fed or hungry"... "living in plenty or in want"
 - b. Christian contentment is possible in every possible life circumstance; whether the sun is shining or the rain is falling; whether people are applauding or cursing... or ignoring you
8. Paul's statement of the secret

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

- a. the inner strengthening by Christ and by the Holy Spirit
- b. The opposite of contentment is discontentment... circumstantial unhappiness, usually resulting in **complaining, whining, murmuring against God**

- c. Paul is saying that is a display of WEAKNESS
- d. But by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Christians can stand strong in the midst of all of life's circumstances and display the FRUIT of the SPIRIT: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control

9. Jeremiah Burroughs's definition... 1642, "The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment"

Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit that freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.

- i) It is a FRAME OF SPIRIT: an attitude of the heart, a demeanor, a disposition... sweet, inward, quiet, gracious
- ii) God's disposal = God's WISE, FATHERLY DECISIONS about your life
- iii) Freely submits to & delights in God's decisions

Contentment is not a sullen shrug that says "What can I do about it? He is God and I can't fight him." But it says "I trust him, I love him, I know everything he decides to do is right, and I will get to heaven and celebrate even the smallest details of his decisions in my life; so I will delight in them NOW!

THAT, my friends, is the "rare jewel of Christian contentment"

Paul displayed it openly in the Philippian jail; Paul taught it openly in Philippians 4

But he argues from that point of view here in 1 Corinthians 7

II. Christian Contentment Applied to Life Status

A. See Christian Contentment, Even if You Don't See the Word

1. Basic rule

^{NAU} 1 Corinthians 7:17 Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches.

- a. The language of the Lord **assigning** is the language of PROVIDENCE, or as Jeremiah Burroughs would say, "God's wise and fatherly disposal"... God wise and fatherly decisions about your life

- b. The Greek word is “meridzo” which means to “divide, separate, distribute, apportion”... to give a measured portion to each
 - c. Intentionality in this... God’s ALLOTMENT for each person
 - d. The grammar is a little unclear here in verse 17: it could be the life circumstance the person was in WHEN GOD CALLED THEM to become a Christian... or it could be that God CALLED THEM TO that life circumstance... it’s unclear
2. Paul repeats this mentality in all these life situations, as we’ve seen
- a. To the circumcised (i.e. Jews) and to the uncircumcised (i.e. Gentiles), he gives this clear advice

1 Corinthians 7:18 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised.

- i) This is interesting, because clearly a circumcised man cannot become literally “uncircumcised”
- ii) What Paul means here is, the lifestyle you were living as a Jewish person or a Gentile person, keep living it...
- iii) Jews don’t have to become Gentiles to live a good life; and Gentiles don’t have to become Jews
- iv) Just keep living your life in the pattern God chose for you, and the life circumstance you were in when you became a Christian
- v) He makes a strong theological statement about the Jewish ceremonial law here, represented by circumcision

1 Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts.

- vi) Amazing, because in the Old Covenant era, circumcision WAS a command; but since Christ died and rose again, the barrier of Old Covenant regulations separating Jews from Gentiles has been removed; God’s commands are summarized by the TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS

Love the Lord your God with all your heart... love your neighbor as yourself

- vii) Be content living your daily life as you have—Jews should be Jews, and Gentiles should be Gentiles... as long as you walk in holiness in obedience to God’s moral law

1 Corinthians 7:20 Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.

3. Next... Slaves

a. Paul extends this teaching on contentment in life circumstances to slaves:

1 Corinthians 7:21-24 Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you-- although if you can gain your freedom, do so. ²² For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴ Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.

b. Paul is giving slaves a heart freedom, a spiritual freedom in Christ to live an excellent Christian life even if you are a slave every day you live from now until you die

c. DON'T LET YOUR LIFE SITUATION TROUBLE YOU!

i) Bloom where you're planted!

ii) Don't be pining after a new situation in life

iii) Don't let the fact that you are a slave cause you concern

iv) You are FREE in Christ to live a life pleasing to him

v) All that matters is doing Christ's will!

vi) On Judgment Day, the ones who served the most on earth will be rewarded the most highly in heaven

vii) Conversely, even if you gain your freedom, you are still Christ's slave... you need to obey him

viii) NOT ONLY THAT, you are slave to everyone around you... servant of all... laying down your life to serve others

d. BUT having said all that, being content doesn't mean you can't try to better your situation

i) IF YOU CAN GAIN YOUR FREEDOM, DO SO!!

ii) In the Philippian jail, Paul and Silas were content to stay there as long as God willed

iii) Even when their chains fell off and the prison doors flew open, they did not run away

- iv) If they had, the Philippian jailer would have committed suicide and his family would never have been saved
- v) But the next day, when the officials set them free, they left the prison; it is better to be free than to be in jail
- vi) So also it is better to be a freedman than to be a slave

1 Corinthians 7:23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.

- vii) But until that day comes, be content to be free in Christ and serve him in that role God chose for you
- viii) Keep in mind that Paul strongly urged Philemon to set Onesimus free... so this mentality does not extend to keeping others enslaved
- ix) But Paul is speaking to the slave himself saying don't be constantly thinking day after day, "If I only had my freedom, then my life could really begin!"
- x) No, your life really began the moment Christ set you free from sin and death and hell!!

***John 8:34-36 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin...
³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***

III. Christian Contentment Applied to Marital Status

A. This Mentality Paul Extends Now to the Topic at Hand: Marital Status

1 Corinthians 7:25-28 Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶ Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. ²⁷ Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.

B. He Addresses Virgins

1. Single people, in that society still living in their parents' homes... perhaps betrothed to be married, but not yet married
2. Paul's advice = the Word of the Lord
 - a. Paul says he has no specific command from the Lord (as he did earlier about divorce)
 - b. BUT he renders a wise judgment as someone who has been made wise by the grace of God

- c. And what is that advice?
3. STAY in the condition you were in when called!
- a. If you are married, stay married... he already covered that!
 - b. The alternative is to get a divorce, and that's not biblical
 - c. But the real advice here is to single people: STAY SINGLE IF YOU CAN!
 - d. Don't allow your mind to be dominated by worldly things... this life is BRIEF, our time here is TEMPORARY

1 Corinthians 7:26 Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are.

- e. The "present crisis" = the general persecution Christians are facing in this world... life is hard here; let's focus on serving the Lord in the brief time we have here on earth
- f. Paul will expand this concept greatly in future verses... but the basic philosophy is clear: BE CONTENT IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF YOUR LIFE!

1 Corinthians 7:27 Are you unmarried? Do not seek for a wife.

- i) The word "seek" is huge here... as though this were the constant focus of your existence on earth
- ii) What do you SEEK?

God is seeking people who will worship him... who will SEEK him

John 4:23 true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

Hebrews 11:6 God rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Christ came to seek lost people and save them:

Luke 19:10 the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

John 5:30 I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

Christ calls us to seek first his Kingdom

Matthew 6:33 Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

We should not be seeking great things for ourselves in this world:

1 Corinthians 10:33 I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

- g. Single people can get to be DOMINATED by looking for the right person... as though their whole purpose in life is to get married
- h. Don't let your marital status dominate your thinking! Don't be pining day after day for marriage, the day you finally can meet your "soul-mate"... in Christ, you already met your true and eternal SOUL MATE... "Jesus, lover of my soul"

4. BUT... if you do choose to get married, it's not a sin!

1 Corinthians 7:28 But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.

C. More Next Week on Paul's Argument for the Superiority of Singleness!

IV. Applications

A. Have You Learned the Secret of Christian Contentment?

- 1. Though Paul never mentions contentment by name, that is exactly what he is talking about here!
- 2. Christian contentment can only be found in Christ... not in a specific earthly situation
- 3. COME TO CHRIST!!
- 4. Then, pursue contentment in any and every situation

B. Don't Let Circumstances Trouble You... BLOOM WHERE YOU'RE PLANTED

- 1. Trust that God has placed you in exactly the right situation for you shine for him
- 2. If Paul can even speak to slaves and say "Don't let your slavery trouble you," how much more would he say the same to you about
 - a. A dead-end job you hate
 - b. Your housing situation
 - c. A medical situation that is bringing you pain
 - d. A bodily limitation you can't change

- e. A financial trial you are under
3. Realize this doesn't mean that if God opens a door to make a change, you shouldn't walk through it
 - a. If you are in a dead-end job, this scripture is not against you getting out your resume and making some searches to find a better job
 - b. What this is against, though, is being angry and frustrated and mentally dominated about your circumstance before God finally opens the door to move

C. Specifically Accept Paul's Advice About Marriage

1. Single people: be content in your singleness
2. Don't feel like you're half a person until you meet your spouse

The other day I watched the old clip from the original Snow White and the Seven Dwarves... as she sang "Someday my prince will come" ... some young ladies live their single lives that way, daily pining after some guy who will come and sweep her away to a happy life

This chapter is specifically against that kind of mentality

So also for single guys

3. Married couples: obviously the text is against divorce
4. But it's far deeper than that! It's in seeing God's hand in your present circumstances... GOD HAS MEASURED THIS LIFE OUT for you... pining after something else is sinful and hurtful to your marriage and to your fruitfulness in Christ

D. To Everyone: BLOOM WHERE YOU'RE PLANTED...

1. Seek God's face
2. Seek God's kingdom
3. Seek God's righteousness in your life
4. Seek and save the lost
5. Seek benefits for OTHERS