

Understanding Your Identification 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

Introduction:

1. The text before us may seem like an odd passage to have in a chapter that deals with marriage issues. On the surface it appears to have nothing to do with marriage.
2. When you begin to understand the importance of the teaching in this passage, you suddenly realize how crucial it is to the marriage relationship.
3. Paul is dealing with the issue of the believer's true identification. All believers are **called** to a special place, position and privilege. Our calling involves:
 - A special place of fellowship with Christ. **1 Corinthians 1:9**
 - A secure position of being spiritually one with Christ. **1 Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 4:1, 4**
 - A sure privilege of a future inheritance with Christ. **Ephesians 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:10-11**
4. This is quite a calling! Our true identity (who we are) is found in this calling. This is why Paul prayed earnestly for believers to be enlightened and have understanding to see this. **Ephesians 1:17-19**
5. Whether you are single or married, Jew or Gentile, bond or free, an understanding of your true identity in Christ is the key to having a heart that is **at peace**.
6. Satan and the world tell you just the opposite. They say if you can just change your **outward circumstances**, you'll be at peace. If you can just change your **outward identity**, you'll be happy. If you can just change your **outward status**, you'll find fulfillment.
7. These are all lies, and they do not give what they promise. This is the point Paul is making in this text. Why would Paul emphasize this identification issue in a text dealing with marriage issues?
 - Because a lack of understanding concerning your **true** identification is what leads to marital problems and divorce. We think if we can change our spouse's actions or just change to a different spouse, it will bring peace in our lives.
 - It also leads to single adults who are frustrated and miserable.
8. Until you are at peace with who God has made you in His Son, you will be frustrated and miserable in the relationships of life.

Paul teaches these believers where their true identity is NOT found.

1. It is **not** found in your outward circumstances. vs. 17
 - The context of verse 17 is a believer who finds himself married to an unbeliever.
 - Paul teaches that the believer should not be quick to simply change the circumstances by getting out of the marriage. vs. 13, 16
 - Instead of walking **out** of your present circumstances, simply walk with Christ **in** your present circumstances. vs. 17; **Colossians 2:6**
 - Instead of trying to manipulate things and change your circumstances, let Christ change you **through** the circumstances you find yourself in.
 - We can get the false notion, "If I can just change my spouse or change the conditions of life, things will be better and I'll be happy." It simply won't work for the believer.

2. It is **not** found in your outward identity. vs. 18
 - Paul is saying that if you are a Jew, don't try to become a Gentile. If you are a Gentile, don't try to become a Jew.
 - Your **true** identity is not found in your **outward** identity. It's not found in your outward, physical characteristics. It is not found in your race, the color of your skin, your nationality. vs. 19
 - We **demonstrate** our true identity, not in our physical identification, but in our desire to obey God's instructions given to us through the apostle Paul.
1 Corinthians 14:37
3. It is **not** found in your outward status. vs. 21-22
 - In Paul's day, slavery was very common. What if you had been called into the special position of being in Christ and you were a slave? Paul says, "...*care not for it.*" In other words, don't worry or fret about it for one minute.
 - In Christ you are free, so serve Christ in your status as a slave. **Titus 2:9-10**
 - If your status is one of freedom, don't think that this outward status gives you a spiritual advantage over a brother who is a slave. Remember you are Christ's servant.
 - What's the point? A person's identity is not found in his outward status in this world. Your identity is not found in your marital status, financial status, and social status, what kind of car you drive, or neighborhood you live in. If you think it does, you are deceived.
4. Christian, your identity has nothing to do with where you are, what kind of conditions you live in, what your circumstances are, or what you possess.

Paul teaches these believers where their true identity is found.

1. **You belong to Christ. vs. 23a**
 - Some people think their identity is based on who they work for, or who they are married to, or who they know.
 - Christian, your identity is based on who you belong to. Jesus Christ!
 - You have been bought with Christ's shed blood. You belong to the risen Lord.
1 Corinthians 6:19-20
 - Everything in life changes or is subject to change, but one thing never changes, and that is our position of being "in Christ." **Ephesians 5:30**
2. **You serve Christ. vs. 23b**
 - Paul shares a vital principle that is crucial for every believer to understand. No matter what you are doing, your attitude is that you are doing it unto Christ.
 - This is why Paul says, "...*be not ye the servants of men.*" Someone may say, "But I thought we were supposed to have a servant's heart and serve others."
 - If you are serving others and you are simply doing it for **them**, you will be very disappointed when they are not thankful, they take advantage of you, they turn on you, or they don't reciprocate. You will feel deflated and depressed.
 - But if you are doing it unto Christ, you realize that He sees it, He appreciates it, and He will reward you in due time. The way **they** respond is a non-issue. Your identity is in Him. **Ephesians 6:5-8** is a key passage.

- This is so important in our marital and work relationships. You can get drained and bitter real quickly if you haven't settled this identification issue of who you belong to and who you serve.
3. You abide in Christ. vs. 20, 24
- Once you have settled the identification issue, you are no longer straining and striving to gain outward status, gain outward acceptance, and outward approval from people.
 - You are no longer in bondage to your circumstances. You are the Lord's freeman! Your identification, your acceptance, your position, your life is wrapped up in Him!
 - You are able to face any circumstance or difficulty with the peace of God. You experience fulfillment without feeling the necessity to change people or change circumstances or change your status.
 - Why is this? Because you have come to understand where your true identity comes from, and you choose to believe and abide in that.

In Conclusion:

1. You can be plagued by your outward, physical identity your entire life, or you can get on with life (as teen-agers say, "Get over it,") and live like who God has made you in Christ.
2. It is not your circumstances or status that will make a difference. It is your understanding of who God has made you in Christ, and taking a stand in that calling.
3. Your outward circumstances, physical appearance, or earthly status are not the issue - your heart is the issue.