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Grow Where You're Planted
7: 17-24

Grow where you're planted DIG: What does the principle mean? Why is it restated three times? What two conditions does Paul address? What historical factors have made it all but impossible for a Jewish believer to obey Paul's instruction here? Why did Paul tell Gentile believers not to convert to Judaism? How were slaves treated during Paul's day?

REFLECT: How does the principle "grow where you're planted" have to do with you? Where have you been planted? How are you growing? How are you affecting others by your growth? Does being circumcised mean nothing to the Jews? In what sense does Paul say that it means nothing? In what sense are you a slave to Messiah? In what sense does Messiah free you?

Let each person live the life the Lord has assigned them.



The Corinthian church was made up of both **Jews** and **Gentiles**, an improbable fellowship. **Paul** uses it and applies it to two "conditions" – being **Jewish** or **Gentile**, and being **enslaved** or **free**, repeating at the end and in the middle of each of these encouragements not to seek unnecessary change in one's religious or social or economic status when the time can be better spent serving **the Lord**.[194]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being such a wonderful and gracious Heavenly **Father** – always caring and always there with **Your** children to help and*

to guide us. ***For God Himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).*** *Thank* ***You*** *for allowing* ***Your*** *children the blessing of serving* ***You*** *and being able to serve* ***You*** *in the place that* ***You*** *have put us in. Our heart and love is new for it is now focused on pleasing* ***You*** *rather than on ourselves, but our life work may, or may not, change. What is important is the heart change of love putting* ***God*** *first. Now* ***You*** *work in circumstances to give us a new way to live out our love for* ***You****. Thank* ***You*** *for giving us* ***Your Ruach Ha'Kodesh*** *to live within those who love* ***You*** *and to help and to guide us how to live.* ***You*** *call us to walk as* ***children of love (Ephesians 5:1)****,* ***children of light (Ephesians 5:8)*** *and as* ***wise children (Ephesians 5:15).***

As we spend time in ***Your Word*** *and meditate on what* ***it*** *says, we will have the knowledge how to walk in ways of service that please* ***You****. How wonderful that we can live a life of thankfulness to you* ***(Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6; First Thessalonians 5:18)*** *no matter how hard the situation is. Though earthly trials seem long and hard, they are really only momentary.* ***For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).*** *Eternal joy and peace* ***(Revelation 21:1-4)*** *awaits* ***Your children****.* ***You*** *are a wonderful* ***father*** *and it is a delight to serve* ***You*** *always! In* ***Your*** *holy* ***Son's*** *name and power of* ***His*** *resurrection. Amen*

The principle established (7:17): Only let each person live the life the Lord has assigned him, whether single or married, **and** let **him live it in the condition he was in when God called** (Greek: *kekleken*, in the perfect tense *hints at the continuing effects of that call*) **him (7:17a). Paul** repeats this principle in **7:20: Each person should remain in the condition he was in when he was called,** and like bookends, **he** repeated it for a third time in **7:24: Brothers, let each one remain with God in the condition in which he was called.** I think **Paul** was trying to tell us something! Then, to make sure that **the Corinthians** realized **he** was not treating them any differently from what **he** expected from any of the other churches **he** had started, **Paul** went on to say: **This is the rule I lay down in all the congregations (7:17b).** One gets the feeling that some in Corinth may have been charging **Paul** with treating them differently from, or perhaps more harshly than, his other churches.[195]

To be, or not to be Jewish (7:18-20): Those in the church at **Corinth** who were **Jewish** when **they** received **Messiah** wondered if **they** needed to stop being **Jewish** in order to follow **Yeshua**. **Paul** assured **his Jewish** readers that that wasn't the case, saying: **Was someone already circumcised when he was**

called, that is, **a Jewish** believer**? Then he should not try to remove the marks of his circumcision (7:18a).** This had both a symbolic and a literal meaning.

First, literally, this had a very specific application. **Circumcision** was an embarrassment in the Roman world. According to the Maccabees, some **Jewish** men "made themselves **uncircumcised**." Josephus tells us that during the Greek rule of the eastern Mediterranean several centuries before Messiah, some **Jewish** men who wanted to be accepted into Greek society had surgery performed to make themselves appear **uncircumcised** when they bathed or exercised in the gymnasiums. They literally became **uncircumcised** surgically. The Roman encyclopedist Celsus, in the first century AD, wrote a detailed description of the surgical procedure for decircumcision (*De Medicina* VII. 25).[196]

Secondly, symbolically, we can reasonably infer that **Paul** meant that **Jews** should not try to assimilate into **Gentile**, or so-called "Christian" culture, but should **remain** strictly Messianic. **Paul** drew the principle that **he** opposed **Jewish believers** removing the mark of **circumcision**, most likely using an example from the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century AD (First Maccabees 1:11-15; and allusions to the phenomenon in the Assumption of Moses 8:3 and in Avot 3:11), and how it would it would lead to **Jewish** apostasy away from **ADONAI**. Why some **Jewish believers** may have thought **circumcision** was unnecessary is because **Paul** opposed **Gentile** circumcision **(Galatians 5:11)**.

Curiously, when a **Jew** come to believe that a fellow **Jew**, **Yeshua**, is **the Jewish Messiah** promised in the **Jewish** Scriptures, today's **Jewish** community considers it the very essence of assimilation into the **Gentile** world. Yet here is a verse from one of the books of the B'rit Chadashah that strongly discourages **a** Messianic **Jew** from assimilating. These conflicting views result from **five historical factors** which have made it all but impossible for a **Jewish** believer to obey **Paul's** instruction.

First, since B'rit Chadashah times, a **Jew** who acknowledges **Yeshua** as **the Messiah** has usually been excommunicated by his own **Jewish** people, or at best regarded with suspicion; so that even if he wants to follow **Jewish** customs, participate in the **Jewish** festivals, and **remain** loyal to his **Jewish** roots, it isn't easy for him to do so in isolation.

Second, no longer welcomed in the **Jewish** community, he goes to a church. But there, even though **Jews** and **Gentiles** are equal in **God's** sight, **Gentiles** are the

vast majority. He finds himself a lone **Jew** in a sea of **Gentiles**, vastly outnumbered, with few or no other **Jewish believers** to support him in his efforts to preserve his **Jewishness**. Most **Gentile believers** are generally oblivious to this challenge and wonder why **Jews** aren't just happy in church, asking such questions as, "Why would you want to go back under the Law!"

Third, the Church has usually maintained a mistaken view of conversion. Instead of understanding that a **Jewish believer** converts from sin to righteousness (the same as a **Gentile** believer), it is thought he converts from Judaism to Christianity. By the fourth century AD the Roman Catholic Church was requiring **Jewish believers** to sign documents in which they had to agree to stop following **Jewish** customs or associating with unsaved Jews. Further, since the Roman Church decreed this view, it was not surprising that **the Jewish** community used it as evidence that **a Jewish believer** was no longer **Jewish**. If this was true (which it was, and is not), then it would be appropriate to urge **Jewish believers** to eliminate all of **their Jewish** practices. But this was, and is not true, showing that the first **Jewish believers remained** fully **Jewish**, and encouraging today's **Jewish believers** to do the same.

Fourth, the Church has misunderstood the B'rit Chadashah's teaching about the unity of **Jews** and **Gentiles** in the Messianic Community **(12:13)** and therefore misused it to force Messianic **Jews** to assimilate. Members of every other ethnic group are encouraged to maintain their culture and express their faith within it. But when a Messianic **Jew** does so, he may be accused of "legalizing" **(Romans 6:14)**, "Judaizing" **(Galatians 2:14)**, and "raising the middle wall of partition" **(Ephesians 2:11-16)**.

Fifth and last, it cannot be denied that some **Jewish believers** have had a measure of self-hate (although this unfortunate phenomenon is also found among non-Messianic **Jews**). In their desire to be accepted by their new **Gentile** friends in the Church they may have said or done things that depreciate **Judaism** or **Jewishness**. On the one hand, **Judaism's** failure to recognize **Yeshua** as **the Messiah** is a sin of grievous dimension. On the other hand, no Messianic **Jew** should ingratiate **himself** with **Gentile** Christians by appealing to antisemitic impulses. **Jewish** self-hate is simply not a concomitant of the gospel.

The challenge for today's Messianic **Jews** is to establish, despite these factors, a Messianic synagogues in which **they** can express fully **their** ties with both Messianic **Jews** and believing **Gentiles** in **the Lord** since **the dividing wall of hostility which divided us has been broken down (Ephesians 2:14).**[197]

Was someone uncircumcised when he was called, that is, **a Gentile** believer**? He shouldn't undergo circumcision (7:18b).** That is, **a Gentile believer** shouldn't convert to **Judaism** and be **circumcised**. This does not speak of **a Gentile believer** who wants to give up **his** faith in **Yeshua** and convert to non-Messianic **Judaism** – of course, **Paul** would never approve of that. Rather, **he** says that **Gentile believers** should not undergo conversion to **Judaism** while retaining **their** faith in **Yeshua** because at the time of **Paul's** writing there was a strong Judaizing movement (see the commentary on **Galatians, to see link click Ag – Who Were the Judaizers**), but **he** does not deal with that corrupt teaching here. **He** is basically saying that for **believing Gentiles** to convert to **Judaism** was unnecessary. There were more important things to do, namely, serving **the Lord**.

Being circumcised means nothing, and being uncircumcised means nothing. By themselves, out of context, these words are a slap in the face of **Judaism**, in which **circumcision** confirms a man's and a woman's membership in **God's people** under the covenant with **Abraham** (see the commentary on **Genesis En – For Generations to Come Every Male Who is Eight Days Old Must be Circumcised**). This verse does **not** teach that **Jews** should give up **their Jewishness**. Many **Jewish believers** of the past have assimilated **their** way into the **Gentile** church and stopped circumcising **their** sons, remembered the Sabbath or appointed times, or ate kosher. It is absolutely appropriate for **Jewish believers** to oppose this sort of assimilation. Also, it is quite clear that **God** has a special, *national*, **calling** for **Isra'el, "For all Isra'el will be saved" (Romans 11:29).**[198]

But in **the Corinthian** context, **Paul** is talking about an *individual* **calling** to salvation. And in that regard, **Jews and Gentiles** have an equal standing before **ADONAI (Romans 3:22-23** and **29-30; First Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 2:13, 3:28, 5:6** and **6:15; Colossians 3:11).** Ethnic ties, cultural expressions, customs and social or religious status have no bearing in individual salvation; in this regard, being **Jewish** or **Gentile means nothing**. However, **what does mean something is keeping God's commandments (7:19b). The entire Torah is summed up in a single command, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14).**[199]

And repeating for the third time: **Each person should remain in the condition he was in when he was called (7:20). It is important to remember that Paul didn't suggest that we should never change our status. He said that we should remain as we are, in relationships and service, until ADONAI**

assigns us new tasks.[200]

To be, or not to be a slave (17:21-24): Paul now moves to his second example, this time concerning **slaves**. **His** point is not to approve of **slavery** or to suggest that it is as good a condition to live under as freedom. **His** point is that, if a person is **a slave**, he is still able to serve **the Lord**. No circumstance, no matter how terrible, painful, or unjust, can keep us from being **salt** and **light in the world** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Df – You are the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World**). **A slave** can, in fact, serve **Messiah** through **his slavery (Ephesians 6:5-8)**. Paul consistently taught that principle. **Slaves** were to serve **their masters** honestly and sincerely: **Whatever work you do, put yourself into it, as those who are serving not merely other people, but the Lord (Colossians 3:23). Slaves** had a unique opportunity to testify for **the Lord**. **They** were to show **their** human masters that **they** worked hard and honestly, not because **they** were forced to, but because **they** wanted to, out of love for and **their** obedience to **their** true **Master** and **Lord**. **They** could demonstrate true contentment and peace in the midst of **slavery**, thus showing the inner provision of salvation.

The book of **Philemon** centers around the runaway **slave Onesimus**, whom **Paul** had led to **Messiah** while **in prison (Philemon 10).** As it happens, **Onesimus's** owner was **a believer**. **He** was **Paul's beloved brother and fellow worker** and the church in Colossae **met in his home (Philemon 1-2). The apostle** makes a strong personal and spiritual appeal for **Philemon** to forgive **Onesimus** and to take **him** back, not just as **a slave**, but as **a brother in Messiah (Philemon 16)**. Yet, as sticky as it is for some social activists today, **Paul** did not condemn **slavery** or question **Philemon's** legal rights over **his slave**. **He** did not ask for social justice for **Onesimus**. In fact, **he** even used **slavery** as an analogy for **the believer's** walk with **God**.

In the Roman empire of **Paul's** time, around fifty percent of the population were **slaves**. But unlike most **slaves** throughout history, **the slave** of that day often was better educated, more skilled, and more literate and cultured than the average free person. A large percentage of the doctors, teachers, accountants, and other professionals were **slaves**. Many of them lived in relative ease and were treated with respect. Others, of course, lived in constant poverty and humiliation under cruel and merciless masters.

Paul made no distinction. **Were you a slave when you were called?** Any **slave**,

in any circumstance, was to be willing to **remain** as **he** or **she** was. Only sin can keep us from obeying and serving **the Lord** . . . circumstance cannot. Therefore, if we are in a difficult, uncomfortable, and restricting situation, **don't let it bother you,** but be determined to be faithful as long as **the Lord** leaves you there **(7:21a).** However, even having affirmed that principle, **Paul** makes it clear that **he** did not consider **slavery** to be the most desirable condition: **Although if you can gain your freedom, take advantage of the opportunity (7:21b).** Freedom is immeasurably better than **slavery**, and **believers** are not more spiritual for staying in **slavery**. If a believer had the opportunity to become **free**, as did many **slaves** in B'rit Chadashah times, **a believer** should **take advantage** of **it**. **Paul** was content to be in jail and to serve **the Lord** as long as he was jailed. **He** carried on much of his ministry from a jail cell. But when **he** was **freed**, **he** left jail. If **a slave** who was **a believer** had **the opportunity** to **become free**, **he** should take **advantage of the opportunity**.[201]

Now **Paul** uses a "reverse thinking" that is similar to **Ephesians 6:5-9** and **Colossians 3:22** to **4:1**, where **he** likewise deals with **slavery**. **Slaves** should indeed be obedient to **their masters**, but **they** should also realize that in **the Lord**, **they** have an inner freedom that no one can take away. **For a person who was a slave when he was called is the Lord's freedman.** Similarly, **a slave owner** should realize that, even though **he** may be able to command other people, in the eyes of **the Lord**, **he himself** is **a slave**. **Likewise, someone who was a free man when he was called is a slave of the Messiah (7:22).** We belong to another, **Messiah**, who is **Lord**.

It is perhaps for this reason that **Paul** reiterates here what **he** said in **6:20**. **You were bought at a price, so do not become slaves of other people (7:23).** That is, we are owned by **Someone** who has with **His blood** paid the purchase price for us, namely, **Yeshua Messiah**. The statement, **do not become slaves of other people**, perhaps reflects the situation brewing in **Galatia**, where **Paul** considers that those who, after becoming believers, were being tempted into submitting themselves to all the 613 commandments of **the Torah**, were, in fact, submitting themselves to a new form of **slavery**. Therefore, **he** wrote to those **Galatian** churches: **It is for freedom that Messiah has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).**[202]

For the third time **Paul** gives the principle: **Brothers, let each one remain with God in the condition in which he was called (7:24).** However, it is that we

have been **called** (saved), and in whatever **condition** we are now in, we should be willing to **remain**. **ADONAI** allows us to be where we are and to stay where we are for a purpose. Conversion is not the signal for us to leave our social condition, our marriage, or singleness, our boss, or other circumstances. We are to leave sin and anything that encourages sin; but otherwise, we are to grow where you're planted until **God** moves us.

There is the story of the pastor who was out eating dinner at a restaurant, when a woman recognized him and came over to his table. She said, "I feel like I should go into the ministry." He asked her, "Are you married?" She said that she was. "How many children do you have?" She answered that she had five children. He said, "That's wonderful. **God** has indeed **called** you into the ministry, and **He** has already given you your congregation!"[203]