

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

I am a non-Jewish Messianic Believer, and have been told that my calling as a “Messianic Gentile” is to go back to a church, and not become Torah observant. I am told that I must follow “Paul’s rule,” and that seeking to live more like Yeshua and His Apostles would violate both it and my distinct “calling,” and likely nullify God’s special calling on the Jewish people. I should instead simply help Christians in church, not too interested in their Hebrew Roots, be more favorable to Israel and Jewish issues. Can you please help me?

“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 [assemblies]. Was any man called *when he was already* circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters* is the keeping of the commandments of God. Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Messiah’s slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that *condition in which he was called*” (1 Corinthians 7:17-24, NASU).

On the whole, **1 Corinthians 7:17-24**, is a passage of elusiveness for most of today’s individual Messianic Believers. Bits and pieces of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 have been quoted here or there by various writers and teachers, but for the most part it tends to be something skipped over by Messianic Bible readers, much less probed for its theological and philosophical significance. 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 has, however, been examined in some detail by various leaders within Messianic Judaism, and perhaps because of some of the conclusions drawn by them, 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 has been widely avoided or flat ignored by those within the more independent, Hebrew/Hebraic Roots Messianic sectors. The challenges presented by 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, are reflective of a more widescale avoidance, on the part of most of today’s broad Messianic movement, to examine the Epistle of 1 Corinthians—a letter, which in some ways, is even harder to understand than the Epistle to the Galatians.

There are some deep, ethical questions asked of examiners of **1 Corinthians 7:17-24**, especially given how these verses have been abused in historical interpretation.¹ These verses have been used, at times, to justify retaining the institution of slavery, and to theologically chastise slaves trying to acquire freedom (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:21)—as though slavery were some kind of perpetual spiritual vocation that can never be altered. Likewise, this passage has been used to justify women staying in abusive marriage relationships, where there has been no adultery (cf. Matthew 5:32), but where there is still a hellish nightmare of a marriage. 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 has been used to oppose social mobility, as though extreme poverty is a spiritual vocation that cannot be changed, and that people should not try to really aspire to improve their conditions. 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 has been used as a means for religious authorities to put various groups or sub-groups in their proverbial “place,” discouraging them from accomplishing their dreams and pursuits.

¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Branch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), pp 591-593 includes a useful summary, under the sub-section, “Remain in Slavery?”; see also the observations in Craig Blomberg, *NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp 147-148.

As we approach 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, and what some of the various issues are regarding “Paul’s rule,” J. Paul Sampley summarizes some of the extremes which need to be steadfastly avoided:

“Paul’s...counsel...[in 7:24] can be mistaken as a call to inaction, to do nothing, or even to embrace the status quo. There are circumstances that the gospel cannot abide and we must be unmistakably clear about that. For example, no one should remain in a physically or emotionally abusive situation. The gospel does not call for one to do that. In a similar way, Paul’s counsel to ‘remain’ should not be used as a justification for not seeking better circumstances for oneself and an improvement of one’s circumstances.”²

1 Corinthians 7:17-24 are significantly loaded and complicated verses, not only because of how they have been abused in history—but also because of how readers and interpreters must approach them properly for their ideological and spiritual significance. These factors will involve not only a fair-minded recognition of an examiner’s presuppositions or vantage points going into the text, but also different English renderings of various verbs or clauses, as well as comparison with other Pauline passages. Three principal areas of discussion, which should affect any interpreter’s view of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, are going to concern:

1. The right approach to the Greek noun *klēsis* (κλήσις), “calling” (1 Corinthians 7:20), and the related verb *kaleō* (καλέω), “to call” (1 Corinthians 7:17, 18, 20, 21, 22 [2x], 24), and whether this should be approached as a social/spiritual vocation, **or** a calling by God into salvation and sanctification.
2. A proper rendering of the Greek clause *en tē klēsei hē eklēthē* (ἐν τῇ κλήσει ἣ ἐκλήθη) in 1 Corinthians 7:20 as something literal such as, “in the calling in which he was called” (TLV), **or** something which has a definite value judgment, such as “the state/condition/life situation in which he was called” (RSV/ESV/HCSB).
3. The right approach to the Greek verb *menō* (μένω; 1 Corinthians 7:20, 24), and whether it is best represented by a static English verb like “remain” (RSV/NASU/NIV/NRSV/ESV et. al.), **or** something a bit less static like “abide” (KJV/ASV).

To get an idea about some of the challenges of interpretation, alone, provided by properly translating 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, simply compare and contrast some of the similarities and differences between the 1901 American Standard Version (ASV), and one of its successors, the 1995 New American Standard Update (NASU):

1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24	
ASV	NASU
<p>[17] Only, as the Lord hath distributed to each man, as God hath called each, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all the churches. [18] Was any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Hath any been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. [19] Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God. [20] Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called. [21] Wast thou called being a bondservant? Care not for it: nay, even if thou canst become free, use <i>it</i> rather. [22] For he that was called in the Lord being a bondservant, is the Lord's freedman: likewise he that was called being free, is Christ's bondservant. [23] Ye were bought with a price; become not bondservants of men. [24] Brethren, let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God.</p>	<p>[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. [18] Was any man called <i>when he was already</i> circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. [19] Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but <i>what matters is</i> the keeping of the commandments of God. [20] Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. [21] Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. [22] For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. [23] You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. [24] Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that <i>condition</i> in which he was called.</p>

² J. Paul Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:883.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24—GREEK

[17] *Ei mē hekastō hōs emerisen ho Kurios, hekaston hōs keklēken ho Theos, houtōs peripateitō. Kai houtōs en tais ekklesiáis pásais diatassomai.* [18] *Peritetmēmenos tis eklēthē, mē epispasthō en akrobustia keklētai tis, mē peritemnesthō.* [19] *Hē peritomē ouden estin kai hē akrobustia ouden estin, alla tērēsis entolōn Theou.* [20] *Hekastos en tē klēsei hē eklēthē, en tautē menetō.* [21] *Doulos eklēthēs, mē soi meletō all' ei kai dunasai eleutheros genesthai, mallon chrēsai.* [22] *Ho gar en Kuriō klētheis doulos apeleutheros, Kuriou estin, homoiōs ho eleutheros klētheis doulos estin Christou.* [23] *Timēs ēgorasthēte mē ginesthe douloi anthrōpōn.* [24] *Hekastos en hō eklēthē, adelphoi, en toutō menetō para Theō.*

[17] Εἰ μὴ ἐκάστῳ ὡς ἐμέρισεν ὁ κύριος, ἕκαστον ὡς κέκληκεν ὁ θεός, οὕτως περιπατεῖτω. καὶ οὕτως ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις πάσαις διατάσσομαι. [18] περιτετμημένος τις ἐκλήθη, μὴ ἐπισπάσθω· ἐν ἀκροβυστία κέκληται τις, μὴ περιτεμνέσθω. [19] ἡ περιτομὴ οὐδὲν ἐστὶν καὶ ἡ ἀκροβυστία οὐδὲν ἐστὶν, ἀλλὰ τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ. [20] ἕκαστος ἐν τῇ κλήσει ἡ ἐκλήθη, ἐν ταύτῃ μενέτω. [21] δούλος ἐκλήθης, μὴ σοι μελέτω· ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι, μάλλον χρῆσαι. [22] ὁ γὰρ ἐν κυρίῳ κληθεὶς δούλος ἀπελεύθερος κυρίου ἐστίν, ὁμοίως ὁ ἐλεύθερος κληθεὶς δούλος ἐστὶν Χριστοῦ. [23] τιμῆς ἠγοράσθητε· μὴ γίνεσθε δούλοι ἀνθρώπων. [24] ἕκαστος ἐν ᾧ ἐκλήθη, ἀδελφοί, ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω παρὰ θεῷ.

The ASV, while including a wide amount of Elizabethan period English (although far less than the KJV), leaves an interpreter with a wider array of options and some more literal renderings—whereas the NASU has made some value judgments (see esp. 1 Corinthians 7:20, 24). These will be important to consider as we prepare to evaluate 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 in detail.

Readers and interpreters of **1 Corinthians 7:17-24** generally have two broad options to consider, for what this passage means:

1. The “calling” described by Paul is a Divinely-mandated vocation, in which Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, and those such as slaves, are to remain, and which should never really change.
2. The “calling” is a Divine summons to salvation and sanctification in Yeshua. When called to salvation, each person is found in a different situation or status in life, and a change of status should not be enacted as a condition of being called to salvation. People should instead abide with God in His calling of them to redeeming faith.

Surveying a small selection of resources on 1 Corinthians, one will encounter Christian interpreters who approach **1 Corinthians 7:17-24** as the calling pertaining to a social/spiritual vocation.³ More likely, though, one is prone to encounter those who think that a calling to salvation manifesting in one’s life circumstances, with such a station then being reckoned as some sort of social/spiritual vocation is being described, sometimes with the details left a bit unclear or fuzzy.⁴ The Messianic Jewish interpreters who have commented on this, have tended to take the “calling” in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, as not only being a social/spiritual vocation,⁵ but one that is probably to be rigidly applied so that differences among God’s people almost totally eclipse the common faith we are to all have in Yeshua, and our basic human need for redemption.⁶

While it may be met with some resistance by various contemporary Christian positions, as well as trends in much of current Messianic Judaism—the view defended here will propose that 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 can only be best be viewed, as presenting a **“calling” to salvation and sanctification**. One’s calling into Messiah faith is not

³ W. Harold Mare, “1 Corinthians,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 10:232-233.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, *New Century Bible: 1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971), 71-72; Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp 108-112; Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp 306-322; Blomberg, pp 145-149; Richard B. Hays, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), pp 122-126; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp 544-562; Sampley, in *NIB*, 10:879-884.

⁵ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), pp 457-456; David Rudolph (2010). *Paul’s “Rule in All the Churches” (1 Cor 7:17-24) and Torah-Defined Ecclesiological Variiegation*, 03 November, 2008. *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*. Retrieved 06 June, 2011 from <<http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/scjr/index>>.

⁶ Cf. D. Thomas Lancaster, *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians: Sermons on a Messianic Jewish Approach* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2011), 193; Boaz Michael, *Tent of David: Healing the Vision of the Messianic Gentile* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2013), pp 77-78.

contingent on a particular station in life or social status, and outsiders should not force change onto Believers, as some condition of their salvation. Paul's rule is that each person is to "abide" in his or her calling, in God and His Messiah Yeshua, as it is the Lord who directs the paths of the faithful according to His will and plan.

ch. 7 The passage of the letter of 1 Corinthians, which concerns "Paul's rule," 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, is preceded by a wider discussion about marriage, and one that Paul notably says, concerned "the things about which you wrote" (1 Corinthians 7:1), in a previous, non-extant letter. The marriage issues concerned the mutual sexual needs of man and wife (1 Corinthians 7:2-6, 9), the advantage of someone like Paul being unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:7-8), and what was to be done if a husband or wife was a non-Believer (1 Corinthians 7:9-16). The vignette detailing Paul's rule, is then followed by a series of instructions regarding potential marriage of virgins (1 Corinthians 7:25-26, 29-38), current marriages in Corinth (1 Corinthians 7:27-28), and possible remarriages in Corinth (1 Corinthians 7:38-40). With Paul noting "the present distress" (1 Corinthians 7:26), there are some situation-specific words in 1 Corinthians ch. 7 which are going to have to be considered by readers.

That we encounter Paul's remark, "so I direct in all the [assemblies]" (1 Corinthians 7:17), the principles elaborated upon in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 would have been implemented by him in his ministry service across the board, as he dealt with the status of different groups within the Body of Messiah. As can be detected, given the diversity of marriage advice in 1 Corinthians 7:1-16, 25-40, while Paul did not actively encourage marriage here to his intended audience, neither did he forbid it, nor did he forbid married couples from being one in the Lord, nor did he actively encourage a believing spouse from leaving his or her non-believing spouse. There is much that had to be considered, on the basis of what was best for one's relationship and service to the Lord, such as whether a husband or wife could sanctify a marriage relationship, and bring a non-believing spouse to saving faith (1 Corinthians 7:14, 16).

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 [assemblies] (NASU).

7:17 The two main statements made in 1 Corinthians 7:17, which will control much of the discussion and debate over "Paul's rule," are the Apostle's assertion: *hekastō hōs emerisen ho Kurios, hekaston hōs keklēken ho Theos* (ἐκάστῳ ὡς ἐμέρισεν ὁ κύριος, ἕκαστον ὡς κέκληκεν ὁ θεός). The two main verbs to consider are *merizō* (μερίζω), "**deal out, assign, apportion**" (BDAG),⁷ and *kaleō* (καλέω), "**to call, summon**" (LS).⁸

It is not difficult to see that there are particular stations in life where God has "assigned" or "distributed" (KJV; *emerisen*) people. Where differences of view rest are not on the various life situations where people are placed; differences of view rest with what is intended by Paul in terms of God's "calling" (*keklēken*) of people, which is then enjoined with the direction: "so let him walk" (KJV), *houtōs peripateitō* (οὕτως περιπατεῖτω). People are to walk out their calling, but is the calling synonymous with the station in life assigned to them?

There are those who will interpret 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 from the perspective that the station in life *and* calling are the basically the same thing, with the calling of God to be viewed as a social/spiritual vocation. Alternatively, however, this passage can be viewed from the perspective that the calling of God is a call into salvation and sanctification, and 1 Corinthians 7:17 acknowledges how each person has been placed in a particular life situation distributed by God at the moment of their being called into salvation—but that people are to walk in their calling into a relationship with God, who then directs their paths. Craig Blomberg usefully observes,

"'To which God has called him [NIV],' is a misleading translation; the Greek actually reads, 'as God called him.' In other words, the entire verse implies that in whatever state we are when we come to the Lord, we should function faithfully in that state without immediately seeking to change it."⁹

While there can be some resistance to it, the idea that the calling in view in 1 Corinthians 7:17, is **a calling into salvation and sanctification**, is textually supported by a statement made earlier by Paul in this very letter. In

⁷ BDAG, 632.

⁸ LS, 395.

⁹ Blomberg, 145.

1 Corinthians 1:9, he tells his audience, “God is faithful, through whom **you were called** [eklēthēte, ἐκλήθητε] into fellowship with His Son, Yeshua the Messiah our Lord” (NASU).

Examiners have certainly had to wrestle through the factors of whether or not the “calling” in 1 Corinthians 7:17ff (whether it appears here as the verb *kaleō*, καλέω, or elsewhere as the noun *klēsis*, κλήσις), is a social/spiritual vocation, or a calling into salvation and sanctification. Grammatically speaking, Anthony C. Thiselton describes how “Paul’s most characteristic usages of καλέω [*kaleō*] and κλητός [*klētos*] refer to God’s act of having **called** to Christian salvation, which in Paul’s case (and not only his) coincided with his call to a task of service.”¹⁰ Thiselton further states, “Isaiah’s use of קָרָא (*qara*) prepares the way for the notion of the people of God as the **called** in Rom 8:30 and 1QM 3:2; 4:10-11.”¹¹

A rather general view of 1 Corinthians 7:17, in light of the previous usage of “calling” in the letter, is offered by F.F. Bruce. He asserts, “A man or woman’s social status of is minor importance: what matters is the fact that one has been **called** by God into his fellowship and service (cf. 1.9). To this calling the believer should remain faithful whatever his state of life may be.”¹² Sampley, focusing mainly on 1 Corinthians 7:17, draws the attention of readers and examiners to how the walking out of the gospel, is where the main attention and loyalty of Messiah followers is to be placed:

“Verse 17 and its echoes in v.20 and v.24 affirms that Paul expects persons, in all of his churches, to live, specifically to walk, the gospel in the circumstances where they were called, where the grace of God engaged them. Living the gospel is the primary concern. To put it differently, how they ‘walk’—that is, how they comport themselves—is the key issue. Location and setting are indifferent matters; one’s call is not. The gospel can flourish and be walked out in any circumstance, and the living of it elevates the person and the circumstance in which the person lives. Paul does not require believers to leave their social setting.”¹³

Gordon D. Fee also acknowledges the two points of how “The concept of call is first of all a way of describing Christian conversion. God calls people to be ‘in Christ’ (1:9).” He then goes on to note, “That *call* came to a person in a given social setting. This is the clear emphasis of all the verbs in this passage, especially as it is associated with various social options (vv. 18 [twice], 21, 22 [twice]).”¹⁴ **The steadfast focus of one’s calling, however, is to be placed on the proper way to walk**—and not the station or circumstances of life where such a walk of faith is manifested or demonstrated. The TNIV rendering of 1 Corinthians 7:17, slightly paraphrased, draws the evaluation, “each of you **should live as a believer** in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to you, just as God has called you.”

The statement of 1 Corinthians 7:17ff, is something that the Apostle Paul says, “So I command in all the assemblies” (HNV). A basic, evangelical Christian conclusion drawn for this, by Bruce, is, “Paul’s **rule in all the churches**...was that a believer should be content to remain in the state of life in which he was at the time of his conversion—married or unmarried, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free man.”¹⁵ Simply consider a newly saved Corinthian Believer, raised Greek or Roman, still trying to work through and process the essentials of walking a life of faith in Israel’s Messiah—then having to immediately process the challenges of marriage, or some other significant life change.

While a change in one’s social standing, be it high or low, is not a prerequisite for one being called into salvation—can the possibility be left open for future changes? Fee deliberates how “the concern is with their social setting at the time of that call, which is now to be seen as that which ‘the Lord assigned to each.’ That does *not* mean that one is forever locked into that setting...by saving a person *in* that setting, Christ thereby ‘assigned’ it to him/her as his/her place of living out life in Christ.”¹⁶ He goes on to assert the useful thought, “Paul’s intent is not to lay down a rule that one may *not* change; rather, by thus hallowing one’s situation in life, he is trying to help the Corinthians see that their social status is ultimately irrelevant as such.”¹⁷ One would assume that if a new Believer,

¹⁰ Thiselton, 548.

¹¹ Ibid., pp 548-549.

¹² Bruce, 71.

¹³ Sampley, in *NIB*, 10:880.

¹⁴ Fee, 309.

¹⁵ Bruce, 71.

¹⁶ Fee, 310.

Fee does also say, though, approaching the “calling” as also being a social/spiritual vocation, in “that situation itself is taken up in the call and thus sanctified to him or her.”

¹⁷ Ibid., 311.

called into Messiah faith in a particular social standing, that as further maturity in the Lord occurs in his or her spiritual relationship, that there certainly could—if *not would*—be many who change their social standing *as He directs their walk*. To disallow such change, and to consider 1 Corinthians 7:17ff as presenting rigid and inflexible directions, invites problems (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:21b).

We cannot deny that elsewhere in Paul's letters, especially in a passage like Romans 11:29, that the "calling" in view is one of vocation, but whether the "calling" detailed in 1 Corinthians 7:17ff is a vocation—as opposed to a call into fellowship with God via His Son—should be further probed. While there is a history of interpretation,¹⁸ going back to Martin Luther's German Bible rendering of *berufen*, which would pertain to a vocation or profession,¹⁹ we have to principally be focused on the text of 1 Corinthians, and other Pauline statements where "calling" is addressed.

18 Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised (NASU).

7:18 Two questions are asked by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:18. "[If] having been circumcised anyone was called, let him not conceal [it]. In uncircumcision has anyone been called; let him not be circumcised" (Brown and Comfort).²⁰ While a debate present in other Pauline letters, there does not seem to be an issue present in Corinth over circumcision, and so to a degree this might be considered a somewhat ad hoc example for the issues Paul needed to address to the Corinthians. Disagreement ensues as to whether or not the statuses of circumcised and uncircumcised, concern a social/spiritual vocation, or the condition of a person when being called into Messiah faith.

The first question *Peritetmēmenos tis eklēthē, mē epispasthō* (περιτετημένος τις ἐκλήθη, μὴ ἐπισπάσθω), obviously regards some sort of Jewish status. The verb *peritemnō* (περιτέμνω) means "to cut or clip round about" (LS),²¹ hence "to circumcise," and widely renders the Hebrew *mul* (מול) in the Greek Septuagint. The noun form of "circumcision" is *peritomē* (περιτομή). More notable, perhaps, is the usage of the verb *epispāō* (ἐπισπάω), "to pull the foreskin over the end of the penis, pull over the foreskin" (BDAG).²² Epispasm was an ancient practice, seen during the Maccabean crisis, where Jewish males would "remove the marks of circumcision" (RSV), via a kind of foreskin restoration, of stretching the remaining skin that had not been cut, downward, forcing a new foreskin to grow. An ancient Jewish male, going through the process of epispasm, removing the sign of circumcision, committed the first major act of Hellenization—which subsequently involved abandoning the heritage of the Torah, abandoning the God of Israel, and embracing idolatry. The historical records of both the Apocrypha and Josephus testify to this²³:

"From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of Antiochus the king; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred and thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks. In those days lawless men came forth from Israel, and misled many, saying, 'Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles round about us, for since we separated from them many evils have come upon us.' This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king. He authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil" (1 Maccabees 1:10-15, RSV).

"Therefore they desired his permission to build them a gymnasium at Jerusalem. And when he had given them permission, they also hid the circumcision of their genitals, that even when they were naked they might appear

¹⁸ Thiselton, 549.

¹⁹ "Doch wie einem jeglichen GÖtt hat ausgeteilet. Ein jeglicher, wie ihn der HErr **berufen** hat, also wandele er. Und also schaffe ich's in allen Gemeinde" (Luther 1545 German Bible).

Cf. *Langenscheidts New College German Dictionary, German-English* (Berlin and Munich: Langenscheidt KG, 1995), 99.

²⁰ Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, trans., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 593.

²¹ LS, 633.

²² BDAG, 380.

²³ Cf. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp 454-455.

to be Greeks. Accordingly, they abandoned all the customs that belonged to their own country, and imitated the practices of the other nations" (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 12.241).²⁴

While the crisis of epispasm certainly peaked during the Maccabean era—there should be no denying the fact that various Jews in the time afterward, did in fact Hellenize, removing the marks of circumcision, so that they could be socially mobile in Greek and Roman pagan circles. These were Jews who would have abandoned not only their heritage, but would have apostatized from the God of Israel.

The second question asked in 1 Corinthians 7:18, *en akrobustia keklētai tis, mē peritemnesthō* (ἐν ἀκροβυστία κέκληται τις, μὴ περιτεμνέσθω), obviously regards some sort of non-Jewish status. While most often translated as "uncircumcision," likely due to stylistic reasons in English Bibles (and the fact that sexual anatomy is not often specified as such), the term *akrobustia* (ἀκροβυστία) more literally means "foreskin" (LS),²⁵ and rendered the Hebrew *orlah* (עֲרֵלָה) in the Greek Septuagint. In the Apostolic Scriptures, Paul forbade the majority of the new, non-Jewish Believers, from being circumcised. His disciple Timothy was a notable exception, but he was already half-Jewish, and not being physically circumcised would have caused some unnecessary problems for Paul's ministry activity among Jews (Acts 16:1-3). For those Greeks and Romans, who came to faith in Israel's Messiah, the issue of going through the process of circumcision was not so much one of a medical procedure, but instead an issue of formally becoming a proselyte to Judaism. Much of this was associated with the widespread, ancient Jewish view, "All Israelites have a share in the world to come..." (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1).²⁶ Ethnic heritage was believed to automatically guarantee a Jew, and by extension a circumcised proselyte, eternal salvation.

While in the Messianic community, the period of the Maccabees gets a wide amount of attention, particularly during the season of *Chanukah*—what does not often get a huge amount of attention, is what took place in the generation or so after the Maccabees reclaiming independence for Judea. Various Hasmonean leaders, who established their rule in the Land of Israel, did force non-Jews in places like Galilee, and Greek coastal cities such as Carmel or Gaza, to be circumcised and proselytized to Judaism. Some of this may have been religiously motivated, so that the presence of those Greeks in the region and immediate sphere of influence of Judea, would not be a temptation for the Jewish people to fall into apostasy. Some of this may have been politically motivated, as Jewish leaders consolidated their power. And some of this might have been eschatologically motivated, as it could have been thought that massive numbers of pagans converting to Judaism would herald the arrival of the Messiah and the Day of the Lord. Scot McKnight summarizes,

"At certain periods in history certain Jewish movements, led by charismatic or politically powerful heroes, many conversions took place as the result of force. However triumphalistic the writers' concepts might be, the conversions recorded in Judith (Jdt 14:10) and Esther (Esther 8:17) resulted from force. Hyrcanus, Aristobulus I and Alexander Jannaeus each forced Gentiles to convert and be circumcised, even if they saw such as part of an eschatological program or political purgation (Josephus *Ant.* 13.9.1 §§257-58; 13.9.3 §§318-19; 13.15.4 §397; 15.7.9 §§253-54)."²⁷

There were obviously various, overly-conservative factions of Jewish Believers, within the First Century Body of Messiah, who wanted to see the Greek and Roman Believers circumcised as proselytes, so that they might be assured of salvation (Acts 15:1, 5). This is something that Apostles like Peter said was clearly inappropriate, as all—including Jewish Believers—are saved by the free grace of Yeshua (Acts 15:7-11).

The Apostle 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 B.C.E., and how it would lead to Jewish apostasy away from God. Why some Jewish Believers may have thought that circumcision for Jews was unnecessary, is because Paul opposed non-Jewish proselyte circumcision (Galatians 5:11). If Greeks and Romans did not have to be circumcised, could Jewish Believers not be circumcised as well? Was, at least, the greater interaction between Jews, Greeks, Romans, and others in the Body of Messiah, an indication that the former

²⁴ *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 323.

²⁵ LS, 30.

²⁶ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 604.

²⁷ S. McKnight, "Proselytism and Godfearers," in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 844.

Cf. H.W. Hoehner, "Hasmoneans," in *ISBE*, 2:624.

needed to eliminate practices such as circumcision? A greater interaction between Jews and Greeks was the cause for much of the Maccabean crisis, and so Paul made it clear that Jewish Believers were to not practice epispasm, a major step toward abandoning their heritage. But this is followed by the even more important assertion that the uncircumcised were to not be circumcised.

Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:18 was undeniably conditioned by ancient circumstances. Paul could have opposed Greeks and Romans being circumcised because of the immediate fallout of the Maccabean crisis, with Hasmonean kings forcibly circumcising neighboring peoples—but even more so he would have opposed it because proselyte conversion was incorrectly thought, by many Jews, to assure a non-Jew, a definite place in the world to come (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1). This is why the Apostolic Scriptures place such a high priority on circumcision of the heart, for all of God's people—which not only includes Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, but also females (Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11, 13).

While there are examiners of 1 Corinthians 7:18 who will conclude that the “calling” of those who are circumcised, and those who are uncircumcised, pertains to some kind of a social/spiritual vocation—there are good reasons for us to disregard this view. In 1 Corinthians 7:17 preceding, where the general statement “as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each,” is elucidated—*emerisen* (ἐμέρισεν), “assigned,” is an aorist active indicative verb; and *keklēken* (κέκληκεν), “called,” is a perfect active indicative verb. Is it at all important that in 1 Corinthians 7:18 following, *eklēthē* (ἐκλήθη), is an aorist passive indicative; and *keklētai* (κέκληται), is a perfect passive indicative—both being used for “called”? While it can be definitely debated, various passive verbs in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, are to be regarded as Divine passives, where God and/or His Spirit are accomplishing an action.²⁸ When being “called” (*eklēthē* / *keklētai*) is properly taken as being a calling into salvation by God (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:9),²⁹ it is obvious that circumcision or uncircumcision status does not matter. And, various outside forces within the assembly are not to try to force stark changes on others, as some sort of precondition of their salvation—the most important being ritual proselyte circumcision for non-Jewish Believers.

19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God* (NASU).

7:19 The Apostle Paul actually writes in 1 Corinthians 7:19a, *Hē peritomē ouden estin kai hē akrobustia ouden estin* (ἡ περιτομή οὐδὲν ἐστὶν καὶ ἡ ἀκροβυστία οὐδὲν ἐστὶν), “Being circumcised means nothing, and being uncircumcised means nothing” (CJB). Elsewhere in Paul's letters, he does affirm the value of the rite of circumcision (i.e., Romans 2:25; 3:1-2), which would especially require *here* that a calling to salvation and sanctification (1 Corinthians 7:18) is the overarching issue being addressed regarding his “rule in all the assemblies.”

Immediately, though, readers can be a bit taken aback. While Jewish circumcision status, and non-Jewish non-circumcision/proselyte status—do not matter in terms of a calling by God into salvation—Paul does say in 1 Corinthians 7:19b, “what does mean something is keeping God's commandments” (CJB), or “keeping God's commandments matters” (TLV). But is not being circumcised *a commandment* of Holy Scripture? Some, particularly in Messianic Judaism, have concluded that this regards various Torah commandments specifically applying to Jewish people, and others more generally to non-Jewish people.³⁰ Yet, it needs to be interjected that while native Israelites and sojourners were not exactly the same in the Torah or Pentateuch, their obedience to God's Law was intended to basically be the same, and all in the broad community were admonished to learn to keep all of the Torah (Deuteronomy 31:12). The only major difference of instruction for natives in Israel, who were those circumcised (Exodus 12:19, 48), was the right to eat of the Passover lamb, as well as being granted a tribal inheritance in the Land of Israel and the incumbent responsibilities of caring for such territory. Many ancient sojourners would be circumcised, be regarded as natives, and likely via intermarriage, have their descendants attain tribal territory in the Holy Land.³¹ In the post-resurrection era, all are to be regarded as citizens of the

²⁸ Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp 437-438.

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:9 employs *eklēthēte* (ἐκλήθητε), likewise an aorist passive indicative.

³⁰ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 456; Lancaster, *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians*, pp 241-243.

³¹ Much of this is addressed in the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics, and in the author's book *Torah In the Balance, Volume*

Commonwealth of Israel, with the classification of sojourner or alien status largely reserved for the pre-resurrection time (Ephesians 2:19). In the future Messianic Age, while all will be circumcised—not all will be living in the Land of Israel (Ezekiel 44:9).³²

What really needs to be factored in, to understand Paul's claim in 1 Corinthians 7:19, is how previously in Galatians 5:6, he asserted, *en gar Christō Iēsou oute peritomē ti ischuei oute akrobustia alla pistis di' agapēs engergoumenē* (ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη), "For in Messiah Yeshua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love" (NASU). And in Galatians 6:15, *oute gar peritomē ti estin oute akrobustia alla kainē ktisis* (οὔτε γὰρ περιτομή τί ἐστιν οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ καινὴ κτίσις), "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (NASU). Given these two statements about circumcision and uncircumcision status, and the emphasis on "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6) and "a new creation" (Galatians 6:15), many have concluded that the major, intended thrust of "what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Corinthians 7:19b), pertains to those instructions which can decisively **only be kept** by a person who is born again, filled with God's Spirit, and who is a certain beneficiary of the New Covenant (1 Corinthians 11:25; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27).³³

The amount of ancient Jewish pride, widely due to the fallout of the Second Century B.C.E. Maccabean crisis, for the rite of circumcision,³⁴ is detectable in Paul's words of Romans 2:25-26: "For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?" (NASU). A Jewish person can be circumcised, but still be regarded as a Torah-breaker. Circumcision or uncircumcision status does not matter if one transgresses God's Torah, especially its high moral and ethical statutes (Romans 2:21-24). The Torah commandments to love God and neighbor,³⁵ for example, can only be truly realized in a person who is abiding in God, and has redeeming faith in His Messiah (1 Corinthians 7:24, Grk.).

Unfortunately there are Christian interpreters, like Leon Morris, who have taken 1 Corinthians 7:19 to mean, "No ritual observance can be set alongside the keeping of God's commandments."³⁶ Paul did not oppose the rite of circumcision for Jewish Believers, and even had to stop a false rumor about him that he taught that Jewish Believers should not circumcise their male children (Acts 21:20-22). He did, though, have to place a higher priority on various commandments which concerned a behavior reflective of those who had been called into a relationship with Yeshua. Sometimes, as in the case of Romans 2:25-26, it meant shaming the attitudes of various Jewish Believers who may have had an overly-inflated opinion or unbalanced view of circumcision.

The statement of 1 Corinthians 7:19, was something which was a bit conditioned by a Second Temple Judaism that widely, although most incorrectly, thought that circumcision status/ethnic Jewish identity merited a place for someone in God's Eternal Kingdom. This was the main reason why those like Paul forbade circumcision for the Greek and Roman Believers. This **was not** the medical operation that many millions of men have had in the European and American West since the Nineteenth Century. And, an injunction against circumcision for ancient Greek and Roman Believers—because of a Jewish tendency among many to think that it would merit salvation—should not be taken as a nullification of the futuristic reality that all people will be circumcised, of both heart and flesh, in the Messianic Age (Ezekiel 44:9).³⁷ Such an eschatologically-rooted circumcision for non-Jewish Believers, while not too probable or likely to be observed in the First Century C.E., is something that can be practiced by today's non-Jewish Messianic men (and for good hygiene).³⁸ Circumcision status, even in contemporary Messianic Judaism, is rightly thought not to merit someone a place in the world to come.

³² "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary'" (Ezekiel 44:9, NASU).

³³ Cf. Fee, pp 313-314; Blomberg, 146; Hays, 124.

³⁴ Consult the author's article "The Impact of the Maccabees on First Century Judaism," appearing in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

³⁵ Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

³⁶ Morris, 110.

³⁷ "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary'" (Ezekiel 44:9, NASU).

³⁸ Consult the author's article "Is Circumcision for Everyone?," appearing in *Torah In the Balance, Volume II* for a further review of this topic.

20 Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called (NASU).

7:20 Anyone who performs a little Inductive Bible Study with 1 Corinthians 7:20, will see some (major) value judgments made across English Bible versions:

“Every one should remain in the state in which he was called” (RSV).

“Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him” (NIV).

“Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called” (NRSV).

“Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called” (ESV).

“Each person should remain in the life situation in which he was called” (HCSB).

“Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called” (KJV).

“Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called” (ASV).

1 Corinthians 7:20 is a place where it is necessary for interpreters to adequately evaluate the source text: *Hekastos en tē klēsei hē eklēthē, en tautē menetō* (έκαστος έν τη κλήσει ή έκλήθη, έν ταύτη μενέτω). The Brown and Comfort Greek interlinear version renders 1 Corinthians 7:20 with, “each one in the calling in which he was called, in this let him remain.”

As discussed for the opening statements in 1 Corinthians 7:17, 18, there is divergence as to whether the “calling” in view for 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 pertains to a social/spiritual vocation, or to a calling by God of a man or woman into salvation and sanctification. It is not difficult to see, in most of the English versions above, with the exception of the KJV and ASV, that *klēsis* (κλήσις) has been rendered as either “state” (RSV), “situation” (NIV), “condition” (NASU/NRSV/ESV), or “life situation” (HCSB). This is a certain value judgment on the part of Bible translators, whereas “calling” would be the most literal, leaving English readers the option of deciding what such a “calling” actually is.³⁹

Among more contemporary interpreters, Fee takes “calling” as having a dual meaning, remarking, “the word ‘calling’ here carries...[a] double nuance...Paul wants them to live out their Christian life (i.e., their ‘calling’ to Christ) in the situation (‘calling’) where they were when God called them to Christ.”⁴⁰ While it is appreciable that Fee acknowledges the “calling” of most importance being one of being called into Messiah faith, this important element is decisively lost on Bible readers who are consulting modern versions, which while rendering *klēsis* as something akin to “situation” (NASB), may not have a footnote reading “Lit., *calling*.” (My Hebrew-Greek Key NASB, my main reading Bible, might be an exception to this.)⁴¹

It should be obvious that however the verb *menō* (μένω) is rendered (discussed further), “**the calling in which he was called**” is the more literal translation for *en tē klēsei hē eklēthē*. Equating *klēsis* with something like “condition” (NASU/NRSV/ESV/CJB) or “life situation” (HCSB) can skew one’s approach to what is intended by Paul’s assertion here. Once again, like in 1 Corinthians 7:19, the aorist passive *eklēthē* (έκλήθη) appears for “called,” which if taken to be a Divine passive, would lend strong support for “the calling in which he was called,” being God’s calling of a person into salvation and sanctification in Him. C.G. Kruse describes the general reality, in surveying the Pauline Epistles, is how “When Paul speaks about calling it is, more often than not, the calling of believers to faith and salvation that he has in mind.”⁴²

³⁹ Among Messianic Bible versions, the CJB follows suit with, “Each person should remain in the condition he was in when he was called.”

It is a pleasant surprise, though, to see a more correct rendering in the TLV, “Let each one remain in the calling in which he was called.” The Messianic Writings similarly has, “Let each man remain in that calling in which he was called.”

⁴⁰ Fee, 314.

⁴¹ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, NASB (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994), 1515.

⁴² C.G. Kruse, “Calling,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 84.

His entry does not address 1 Corinthians 7:20, although Kruse does conclude that the “circumstances” of being called to faith are not “callings in the sense of Christian vocations, as some have argued.” He goes on to state, for 1 Corinthians 7:24, “[Paul] is saying that the call to faith does not necessitate a change in life circumstances for those who respond to it” (Ibid., 85).

While there are many Christian interpreters, as well as Messianic Jewish leaders, who will take *klēsis* or “calling” in 1 Corinthians 7:20 as being some sort of social/spiritual vocation—the previous usage of the verb *kaleō* (καλέω) in 1 Corinthians 1:9 and the noun *klēsis* (κλήσις) in 1 Corinthians 1:26, should logically affect how these terms are viewed later in Paul’s epistle:

“God is faithful, through whom **you were called** [*eklēthēte*, ἐκλήθητε] into fellowship with His Son, Yeshua the Messiah our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9, NASU).

“For consider **your calling** [*tēn klēsin humōn*, τὴν κλήσιν ὑμῶν], brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong” (1 Corinthians 1:26-27, NASU).⁴³

It is not difficult to conclude that in the Epistle of 1 Corinthians, *klēsis* and *kaleō* relate to a calling of God into salvation and sanctification.

Outside of Paul’s letter of 1 Corinthians, the closest paralleling Pauline statement to *en tē klēsei hē eklēthē*, “the calling in which he was called,” undeniably appears in Ephesians 4:1-6:

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of **the calling with which you have been called** [*tēs klēseōs hēs eklēthēte*, τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε], with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is one body and one Spirit*, just as also **you were called in one hope of your calling** [*eklēthēte en mia elpidi tēs klēseōs humōn*, ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν]; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:1-6, NASU).

While *klēsis* can pertain to a vocational calling, as it appears in Romans 11:29 per the irrevocable gifts and mandate that God gave to Israel,⁴⁴ how *klēsis* is approached in 1 Corinthians 7:20 is affected far more by 1 Corinthians 1:26 and Ephesians 4:1, than tends to be commonly acknowledged. Earlier in 1 Corinthians 1:9, 26-27, and later in Ephesians 4:1-6,⁴⁵ the “calling” being detailed is one of salvation and sanctification via the Divine activity of God on men and women.

Noting the literal rendering “‘in the calling with which he was called’ (cf. Eph. 4.1)” for 1 Corinthians 7:20, Bruce goes on to describe how “the ‘calling’ (Gk *klēsis*), as in 1.26, is the divine call from darkness to light...it is to this, not to one’s social status, that **every one should remain faithful.**” Noting that while there are interpreters who would disagree, Bruce further asserts, “There is no convincing evidence for taking *klēsis*...in the later sense of ‘vocation,’ with reference to one’s employment or way of life understood as the subject of divine ordination.”⁴⁶ He makes mention of the example of how the one called into faith as a slave, is to take the opportunity to become free when it avails him (1 Corinthians 7:21). The calling to which every person is to be steadfastly loyal, is one of salvation and sanctification in the Lord—not a station in life, which *may be altered* at His sovereign direction.

One should be able to deduce how a translation like “Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called,” can be abused by those in positions of religious authority—as though certain social places in life are those where people must stay, and never leave. Concurrent with the issues caused by improperly translating 1 Corinthians 7:20, with something other than the literal, “the calling in which he was called”—is how the verb *menō* (me,nw) is to be adequately rendered. Almost all modern versions render *menō* as “remain.” Yet, when some older versions are taken into consideration, we do encounter the more neutral rendering “abide” (KJV/ASV). When some theological factors regarding *menō* are weighed in, “abide” should be the preferred rendering for this verb in 1 Corinthians 7:20, and later in 1 Corinthians 7:24.

In our argument for **1 Corinthians 7:24**, this writer will argue that “let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God” (ASV), would be that as each person called to Messiah faith abides in the Lord, He will direct changes to their station in life as is appropriate.

⁴³ One might also consider the word of Hebrews 3:1, “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling [*klēseōs epouraniou*, κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου], consider Yeshua, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” (NASU).

⁴⁴ “[F]or **the gifts and the calling of God** [*ta charismata kai hē klēsis tou Theou*, τὰ χαρίσματα καὶ ἡ κλήσις τοῦ θεοῦ] are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29, NASU).

⁴⁵ Do be aware of the possibility of how various modern commentators on 1 Corinthians 7:20, might not recognize the importance of Ephesians 4:1 for interpreting this verse, because they might be prone to deny genuine Pauline authorship of the Epistle of Ephesians.

⁴⁶ Bruce, 71.

Various Greek lexicons have summarized the different translation options for *menō*, which interpreters need to know:

- CGEDNT: “*remain, stay, abide; live, dwell; last, endure, continue.*”⁴⁷
- TDNT: “This word means a. ‘to stay in a place,’ figuratively ‘to remain in a sphere,’ b. ‘to stand against opposition,’ ‘to hold out,’ ‘to stand fast,’ c. ‘to stay still,’ and d. ‘to remain,’ ‘to endure,’ ‘to stay in force.’”⁴⁸
- BDAG: “in transf. sense, of someone who does not leave a certain realm or sphere: *remain, continue, abide.*”⁴⁹

The most neutral theological rendering for the verb *menō*, in 1 Corinthians 7:20, is “**abide.**” And when the verse is properly translated with, “the calling in which he was called,” with such a “calling” properly recognized as being called by God into salvation and holiness, “**abide**” is clearly the best rendering. This is further realized when various uses of the verb *menō*, as employed in the Gospel narratives of Yeshua, are considered, in particular John 15:4-9:

“**Abide** [*meinate, μέναιτε*] in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it **abides** [*menē, μένη*] in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you **abide** [*menēte, μένητε*] in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who **abides** [*menōn, μένων*] in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not **abide** [*menōn, μένων*] in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you **abide** [*meinēte, μένητε*] in Me, and My words **abide** [*meinē, μένη*] in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; **abide** [*meinate, μέναιτε*] in My love” (John 15:4-9, NASU).

While some modern versions actually translate *menō* as “remain” (i.e., NIV, HCSB, as well as YLT), the clear advantage of rendering *menō* as “abide” is obvious. The necessity of Believers abiding in the Lord Yeshua, is that as the Vine, He provides one the nutrients and ability to grow spiritually. Abiding in the Lord is not a process where one remains stagnant and spiritually under-developed—but instead where those abiding in Him are to grow, mature, and develop more in their knowledge of Him and His love. As such maturity takes place, there are doubtlessly many positive changes which are to occur regarding how people understand their calling into salvation, the great wisdom of God and His Creation, and the potential role (or roles) that such individuals may play via His direction and guidance.

The *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* summarizes some of the theological significance of the Greek verb *menō* and people abiding in Messiah:

“Of particular theological relevance is the use of μένω [*menō*] in the immanence formulas of the Johannine literature. Jesus challenges his followers to *abide* in him (John 15:4-7), as he also *abides* in them (v. 5, reciprocal immanence formulas; cf. also 6:56 [Church redaction]). In 1 John the immanence formulas (2:6, 24, 27f.; 3:6, 24; 4:12f., 15f.: sometimes reciprocal) refer to one’s *abiding* in God or in Christ, sometimes in the ind. and sometimes in the inv. (cf. also 3:9: ‘his seed *abides* in him’; 3:17: ‘the love of God *abides* in him’). This involves an *abiding* as in a realm or a sphere, but is not to be understood in a mystical sense. One may note a partial correspondence between the reciprocal formulas and Paul’s alternation between ἐν Χριστῷ [*en Christō*] and Χριστὸς ἐν ἡμῖν [*Christos en hēmin*].”⁵⁰

There is no denying the advantage, when the “calling” of 1 Corinthians 7:20, is properly evaluated to be the calling of a man or woman into salvation and sanctification—of translating the verb *menō* as “abide.” There are key usages of the verb *menō*, in relationship to people abiding in a relationship with Yeshua, which is something in view in 1 Corinthians 7:20 as well: “**Let each one abide in the calling in which he was called**” (my translation). This is to be an individual’s relationship with the Lord, where no outside influence or caustic force in the assembly

⁴⁷ Barclay M. Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies/Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1971), 113.

⁴⁸ F. Hauck, “*menō*,” in *TDNT*, 581.

⁴⁹ *BDAG*, 631.

⁵⁰ *BibleWorks 8.0: Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. MS Windows Vista/7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2009-2010. DVD-ROM.

is to try to interfere with His special work, especially in terms of placing human pre-conditions on a person being called into salvation.

21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Messiah's slave. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men (NASU).

7:21-23 In the midst of the discussion pertaining to Paul's "rule in all the assemblies" in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, is an example of what was to be done regarding ancient slaves. Paul inquires, "Were you called as a slave? Don't let that bother you—but if indeed you can become free, make the most of the opportunity" (1 Corinthians 7:21, TLV). Some might be prone to take the being "called" (represented by the aorist [Divine] passive *eklēthēs*, ἐκλήθης) as a social/spiritual vocation—and there are those in history who have not only taken slavery as a social/spiritual vocation, but who have errantly argued that it was a status which few could leave, and that the institution of slavery should not/never be abolished. This should be immediately disregarded, because Paul asserts, "if you are able also to become free, rather do that" (NASU). The being "called" in view is best taken to be the calling of an ancient slave into salvation and sanctification, further specified as being "called in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:22). A status of slavery in life, has undoubtedly been assigned by God (1 Corinthians 7:17)—but it is a status, for the ancient First Century slave, **which should have been changed if the opportunity for freedom presented itself.** A calling into salvation and sanctification, though, can be manifested in a position of slavery, given the likelihood that many First Century Believers in the Mediterranean basin, who were also slaves, may not have been given freedom. Paul further asserts,

"For the one who was called in the Lord as a slave is the Lord's freeman. Likewise the one who was called while free is Messiah's slave" (1 Corinthians 7:22, TLV).

A status in life, such as being a slave or being free, does not matter in terms of being "called in the Lord," *en Kuriō klētheis* (ἐν κυρίῳ κληθείς), as both are spheres where people can represent Him and behavior that reflects their calling by Him into redemption. Yet, there is a major difference between the free person, who when called into faith, may be regarded as the Messiah's slave—and the one who was called into faith while being a slave owned by some other mortal person. No matter how some of these verses may have been abused in history (i.e., 1 Corinthians 7:20, 24), the Apostle Paul is hardly one who opposed social mobility, **and he was subversive to ancient First Century norms when it came to the issue of slavery.** He candidly states, "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters" (1 Corinthians 7:23, NRSV). The work of the gospel in saving all people, slave or free, is something that was to work its way in society in people not owning other people, seeing the eventual abolishment of the practice. It is a sad shame that even in our Twenty-First Century world, forms of slavery still exist in the third world.

24 Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called (NASU).

7:24 The closing statement to what has been regarded as "Paul's rule in all the assemblies," closely mirrors that of what was asserted previously in 1 Corinthians 7:20, but there are some rendering issues. Here are a variety of contemporary English translations of 1 Corinthians 7:24, from the same versions we quoted previously:

"So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God" (RSV).

"Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to" (NIV).

"In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God" (NRSV).

"So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God" (ESV).

"Brothers, each person should remain with God in whatever situation he was called" (HCSB).

"Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God" (KJV).

“Brethren, let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God” (ASV).

1 Corinthians 7:24 is a place where it is necessary to turn to the source text for the appropriate answer regarding what is being summarized. A version like the NASU notably has indicated added words in *italics*, which can escape the notice of readers who do not access English Bible versions with this feature: “Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that *condition* in which he was called” (NASU).⁵¹ Here, the value judgment of *klēsis* for 1 Corinthians 7:20 representing “condition” (NASU), is repeated. Other versions, as listed above, do not make such an indication for English readers.⁵² Versions like the KJV and ASV have “wherein he is/was called,” with no additional words. The Brown and Comfort Greek interlinear offers “each one in what [position] he was called, brothers, in this let him remain with God,”⁵³ for *Hekastos en hō eklēthē, adelphoi, en toutō menetō para Theō* (ἐκαστος ἐν ᾧ ἐκλήθη, ἀδελφοί, ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω παρὰ θεῶ). Here, the added word “position,” has been placed in brackets [].

The assertion of 1 Corinthians 7:24 is similar, but not exactly the same, to 1 Corinthians 7:20. Interpreters can be left wondering how to best render *hekastos en hō eklēthē* (ἐκαστος ἐν ᾧ ἐκλήθη), given the presence of the relative pronoun *hō* (ᾧ). Bruce indicates how this clause is “lit. ‘each wherein he was called,’” further remarking, “the rendering **state** is more permissible here than in verse 20.”⁵⁴ Because of the presence of the relative pronoun *hō*, Bruce draws the conclusion that the “calling” or *klēsis* of 1 Corinthians 7:20, can be extended a bit to incorporate one’s life circumstances when called into redeeming faith:

“In this case the sentence is very close to v. 20, with two modifications: (1) the phrase ‘in the calling’ is replaced by the relative pronoun ‘in whatever’; (2) the imperative is modified by the prepositional phrase ‘with God’...Both of these changes seem to verify our interpretation of vv 17 and 20, that simultaneously Paul is referring to one’s situation when called and to God’s call.”⁵⁵

This conclusion is similar to those of other evangelical Christian interpreters previously referenced, where God’s calling people into faith manifests in one’s life circumstances functioning, as at least a semi-spiritual vocation.

The issue regarding *hekastos en hō eklēthē*, “in that in which he was called” (YLT), is actually more complicated than some may realize. Rather than the dative (case indicating indirect object) feminine noun *klēsei* (κλήσει) being repeated from 1 Corinthians 7:20, what appears instead is the dative (case indicating indirect object) neuter relative pronoun *hō* (ᾧ). In his textbook *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Daniel B. Wallace describes how “the relative pronoun (RP) agrees with its antecedent in gender and number, but its case is determined by the function it has in its own clause.”⁵⁶ Technically speaking, for 1 Corinthians 7:20 and 7:24, the feminine *klēsei* (κλήσει) should be followed by the feminine relative pronoun *hē* (ἧ).⁵⁷ What appears instead is the neuter *hō* (ᾧ). Is this a problem? Wallace actually does detail how there are exceptions to the rule, stating, “Not infrequently relative pronouns do not follow the basic rules of agreement. Sometimes the gender of the RP does not match that of the antecedent, usually because of sense agreement superseding syntactical agreement.”⁵⁸ So, it should not seem to be that big an issue for the neuter *hō* representing the feminine *klēsei*.

What this does for an interpreter, is brings us back to the same challenge which had to be evaluated for 1 Corinthians 7:20: Is the calling/*klēsis* in view, a social/spiritual vocation, **or** a calling to salvation and sanctification? Feasibly, modifying the NASU rendering, 1 Corinthians 7:24 could be translated with, “Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that calling in which he was called.” Paul does conclude 1 Corinthians 7:24 with, *en toutō menetō para Theō* (ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω παρὰ θεῶ): “therein abide with God” (ASV). Here, the answer that we

⁵¹ The NKJV has the similar, “Brethren, let each one remain with God in that *state* in which he was called.”

⁵² Among Messianic Bible versions, the CJB follows suit with, “Brothers, let each one remain with God in the condition in which he was called.” The Messianic Writings similarly has, “Brethren, in whatever condition each man was called, let him remain in that condition with God.”

A better rendering is offered by the TLV, “Brothers and sisters, let each one—in whatever way he was called—remain that way with God.”

⁵³ Brown and Comfort, 594.

⁵⁴ Bruce, 72.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Wallace, 336.

⁵⁷ For a concise summary of relative pronouns in Biblical Greek, consult David Alan Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), pp 155-157.

⁵⁸ Wallace, 337.

provided for 1 Corinthians 7:20, about “abiding” (Grk. verb *menō*, μένω) in the “calling”—representing one’s calling into salvation and sanctification—is validated. A Believer, having been called into Messiah faith, is to decisively abide with God in relationship and communion with Him.

7:17-24 Paul’s rule in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 is not that people are to remain stagnant and unchanged in a particular station in life that they perpetually occupy; Paul’s rule is that people are to be abiding in the calling of God to salvation and holiness, who will then direct any changes to one’s status as appropriate. The ancient slave, when presented the opportunity to become free (1 Corinthians 7:21), was to surely take it. Likewise, how many other opportunities would be presented to ancient Believers—where they were called to Messiah faith in a particular life condition, such as being poor, oppressed, or in a nightmarish marriage relationship—who as they prayed to God to fix things, would give them a way out? When an opportunity presented itself, were they not supposed to take it? We should not find a huge amount of problems with Morris’ view, “We should serve God where we are until he calls us elsewhere...[Paul] is not counselling an attitude of passive resignation, an acceptance of the established order at all costs.”⁵⁹

The conclusions drawn in our examination of **1 Corinthians 7:17-24**, are reflected in the following author’s rendering, modified from the 1901 American Standard Version:

[17] Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, so let him walk. And so I direct in all the assemblies. [18] Was anyone called being circumcised? Let him not practice epispasm. Has anyone been called in foreskin? Let him not be circumcised. [19] Circumcision is nothing, and foreskin is nothing, but *what matters* is the keeping of the commandments of God. [20] Let each one abide in the calling in which he was called. [21] Were you called as a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather use it. [22] For he who was called in the Lord as a slave, is the Lord’s freed one; likewise he who was called while free, is Messiah’s slave. [23] You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human beings. [24] Brothers and sisters, let each one, in that *calling* in which he was called, in this abide with God” (1 Corinthians 7:17-24, author’s rendering).

1 Corinthians 7:17-24 and Today’s Messianic Movement

How are today’s Messianic Believers to approach **1 Corinthians 7:17-24**? This passage has been too frequently avoided by Messianic laypersons, who are widely unaware of the different translation and perspective issues relating to “calling.” They are being widely caught unaware, by how various Messianic Jewish leaders of note are applying 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 in a way to make sure that Jewish and non-Jewish Believers rigidly know what their differences are. Suffice it to say, even though things are already complicated enough with much resentment and suspicion among many groups of people in the broad Messianic movement, here in the decade of the 2010s—there is likely to be a new (lamentable) wave of it, substantially caused by those who fail to recognize that the “calling” described in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 is a calling to salvation and sanctification, and not a social/spiritual vocation. Those in positions of influence who are prone to espouse their position, will not be too likely to engage that much with the source text, and instead will argue almost exclusively from various English versions.⁶⁰

Many Messianic Jewish interpreters will look at Paul’s word of 1 Corinthians 7:18a, “Was any man called *when he was already* circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised,” from the perspective that being circumcised, i.e., being Jewish, is a social/spiritual vocation which is not to be abandoned. Messianic Jews have mainly used this, and understandably so, as a means to combat the tendency in far too much of past history, that when Jewish people came to faith in Yeshua, they were to give up their Jewishness. Many Jewish Believers of the past have assimilated away into Christianity, no longer circumcising their sons, remembering the Sabbath or appointed times, or eating kosher. Being enjoined with intermarriage, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of such Jewish Believers often have not had either an appreciation of, or perhaps even knowledge of, their Jewish heritage. *It is absolutely appropriate for Jewish Believers to oppose this sort of assimilation.* But is 1 Corinthians

⁵⁹ Morris, pp 111-112.

⁶⁰ An obvious exception to this could be David Rudolph (2010). *Paul’s “Rule in All the Churches” (1 Cor 7:17-24) and Torah-Defined Ecclesiological Variegation*, 03 November, 2008. *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*. Accessible via <<http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/scjr/index>>.

7:18a the place to base it from? Not if the calling in view is a calling to salvation and sanctification. Paul says *elsewhere*, in Romans 3:1-2 for example, “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God” (NASU).

As we have just argued, with a calling of God into salvation in view, for 1 Corinthians 7:18a, Paul opposes epispasm as it would have decisively led to apostasy, per the Maccabean crisis (1 Maccabees 1:10-15). A prohibition for Greek and Roman Believers called into salvation, to go through ritual proselyte circumcision, does not mean an exemption for Jewish Believers to stop circumcising their sons.

Paul’s further assertion in 1 Corinthians 7:18b, “Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised,” with uncircumcision, i.e., not being Jewish, taken to be a social/spiritual vocation, is now being turned onto today’s non-Jewish Believers who are being led into Messianic congregations, and desiring to live a life of Torah obedience, in emulation of Messiah Yeshua. Such a vocational “calling,” to which non-Jewish Believers are believed to be assigned by God, does not really involve them ever keeping things like the seventh-day Sabbath, appointed times of Leviticus 23, or a kosher style of diet⁶¹—and many non-Jewish Believers in Messianic congregations, probably need to return to a more standard church setting. If such things were to ever be observed, they are believed to only be important as a matter of living in solidarity with the Jewish people, but not as a matter of obedience expected by God of all of His people. If Sabbath-keeping or kosher eating were kept for a reason other than solidarity with the Jewish people, distinctions between Jews and non-Jews are believed to be blurred or erased.⁶² **This understandably can get many non-Jewish Messianic Believers greatly upset**, especially when they are fully committed to being a part of the Messianic community, *including* living in solidarity with the Jewish people. It is as though living a Torah obedient life does not have that much to do with their own spirituality or growth in the Lord.

As we have just argued, with a calling of God into salvation in view, for 1 Corinthians 7:18b, Paul opposed non-Jewish Believers being circumcised as proselytes, because it would feed the idea that such circumcision was necessary for salvation. A common idea present in Second Temple Judaism was, “All Israelites have a share in the world to come...” (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1),⁶³ something resolved at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1, 5) with the decree that four prohibitions had to be followed by the new, non-Jewish Believers (Acts 15:19-21, 29), with Tanach prophecy in the process of fulfillment (Acts 15:15-18). Such prophecy would have doubtlessly included the nations coming to Zion to be taught God’s Torah (Micah 4:1-3; Isaiah 2:2-4), and *when followed* the Apostolic decree would sever the Greek and Roman Believers from their old pagan spheres of influence, and see them attached to a community where Moses was being taught every week (Acts 15:21). The promised New Covenant was to see God’s Instruction supernaturally transcribed onto the hearts and minds of His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27),⁶⁴ not forced onto people via the demands of mortals. On the contrary, all are to abide in the calling into salvation (1 Corinthians 7:20, 24), and allow God to direct them according to His sovereign will. And in the Last Days to be certain, people from the nations were to decisively join with the Jewish people, as one composite people of God (cf. Zechariah 8:23).

Romans 11:29 makes it quite clear that God has placed a special vocational calling onto the Jewish people: “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” **This is an eternal distinction that can never be removed from them**, even with all Messiah followers being a part of a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation as well (1 Peter 2:9-10). But, the “calling” being described in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 is a calling into salvation and sanctification by God, and is directly affected by passages like 1 Corinthians 1:9, 26 and Ephesians 4:1-6. This is something which has not been taken as serious as it should be, by enough of today’s Messianic Jewish leaders.

If, as we have proposed, “Let each one abide in the calling in which he was called” (1 Corinthians 7:20, author’s rendering), is the appropriate way to approach Paul’s “rule in all the assemblies”—what would it mean for ancient Jewish Believers to have abided in their calling to salvation and sanctification? Presumably, it would mean a greater manifestation of God’s grace and wisdom, as seen in the Tanach, demonstrated toward others; a better understanding of such Believers’ Jewish heritage and how it could be used to educate and enrich others; and most importantly a better appreciation for God’s sovereign direction of Israel through the centuries and His plans for

⁶¹ Consult the relevant volumes of the *Messianic Helper* series by Messianic Apologetics.

⁶² Consult the relevant sections of the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* and *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁶³ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 604.

⁶⁴ Consult the author’s commentary *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic*.

restoring the Kingdom. To go through epispasm (1 Corinthians 7:18a) would be throwing this, and many more things, on the proverbial garbage heap.

What would it mean for an ancient Greek or Roman Believer to “abide in the calling in which he was called” (1 Corinthians 7:20, author’s rendering)? Presumably, it would be manifested in a better understanding of their salvation via Israel’s Messiah as those from the nations; a better understanding of and commitment to studying Israel’s Scriptures; a further probing of God’s plan for bringing knowledge of Himself to the world, and how Jewish and non-Jewish Believers together, can enlarge such a mission; a better understanding of and commitment to, obedience to the commandments of God via His Holy Spirit; and participation in the restoration of His Kingdom on Earth, which is to culminate in the Messiah’s return. Being circumcised as a proselyte was entirely incompatible as a pre-condition of being called into salvation, per ancient Jewish issues with it (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1).⁶⁵ Being circumcised in conjunction with future eschatological realities would not have been too likely for the First Century Greek and Roman Believers (cf. Ezekiel 44:9), but it can be observed today by non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic world, where circumcision is decisively not a salvation issue.

Because of religious politics and entangling alliances and the group-think mentality, being what they are for much of the Messianic community, one should not expect **1 Corinthians 7:17-24** to be approached from the perspective of **a calling into salvation and sanctification** by too many Messianic Jewish leaders and teachers in the short term. On the contrary, one should not only expect some of the most rigid social/spiritual vocational calling perspectives possible to manifest, but also a retreading of the tired old complementarian line that we are all “equal in salvation, but different in roles.”

While we should not be led to naively think that each one of us is exactly the same—as natural distinctions among people will always exist—an “equal in salvation, different in roles” perspective has been used in the past to justify slavery, or permit bad things to happen to people, falsely believing that a person’s station in life was/is a Divine vocation that cannot (ever) change or be altered. It has been most recently been used in Christianity to deter women from perusing religious educational opportunities and leadership positions in the Body of Messiah. While today’s Messianic Jewish leaders who have a social/spiritual vocation view of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, are not trying to validate slavery or support a denigration of women—their incorrect interpretation can deter or delay much of the work of God, which is manifesting, in stark reality, on the ground in many of their own congregations (i.e., Zechariah 8:23). *And no one should ever want to be found actually impeding salvation history...*

Those who hold to **1 Corinthians 7:17-24** speaking to a calling by God into salvation and sanctification, have a definite responsibility to demonstrate “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6) and what it means to be “a new creation” (Galatians 6:15), to those with whom we might disagree. While many of our acknowledged Messianic leaders might not “get it” at present—many individual Messianic people most certainly will!

⁶⁵ For a further review, consult the FAQ, “Galatians 5:2-3.”