Don’t Worry About Your Station (Or Situation)

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

“Moving Up.”

“Climbing the Corporate Ladder.”

“Working Your Way Up.”

“Vertical Transfer.”

“Moving up in the World.”

“Goin’ Uptown.”

“Making a better life for yourself.”

“Getting Somewhere.”

“Going Places.”

Isn’t this what life is about?

Moving up?

Not according to the Apostle Paul. At least not as he was writing to the 1st Century Christians in Corinth. In the course of writing to the Corinthians about Marriage Paul seems to write a slight side note, when he writes:

17 Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the churches. 18 For instance, a man who was circumcised before he became a believer should not try to reverse it. And the man who was uncircumcised when he became a believer should not be circumcised now. 19 For it makes no difference whether or not a man has been circumcised. The important thing is to keep God’s commandments.

20 Yes, each of you should remain as you were when God called you. 21 Are you a slave? Don’t let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it. 22 And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ. 23 God paid a high price for you, so don’t be enslaved by the world. 24 Each of you, dear brothers and sisters, should remain as you were when God first called you.

1 Corinthians 7:17-24 NLT

This is the basic principle that encapsulates the whole of the passage. The principle is, “Don’t put too much focus on your earthly station.”

Married, unmarried, slave, free, rich, or poor, concern over these things should not to consume our lives. As I read this text I couldn’t help but think of the term Yuppie. It is a word that came into usage in the 80’s and it is a combination of an acronym and the word ending of the word hippies.

Y oung

U rban

P rofessional

To quote the top definition in the Urban Dictionary (Which I do not always suggest).

(n.) Used to stand for Young Urban Professionals, but has now strayed to define the 20-year-olds at Starbucks who type for hours on their laptops, probably writing a novel that they apparently want EVERYONE at Starbucks to be interested in. They often wear stylish black glasses, slim black clothing, tote yoga mats, and big bulky colored scarves regardless of the temperature outside. They are health conscious, live off salad and black coffee, and often frequent poetry slams and wear jaunty berets. If you ask them what they are writing about, expect to be either talked down to, or have them use the biggest words they can think of, even if they're out of context, hoping you don't know the meaning anyway.

Mitch: "Hey look, I've always wondered what it is those yuppies type away on."

Frank: "Bad idea man."

Mitch: "S'cuse me miss, can I ask what you're writing?"

Yuppie: (Looks up from coffee as if she's never seen people before) "It's an esoteric collectivist's detailed analysis of the resurgence of middle-American culture in relation to the increase in demand for soy milk since its invention in-"

There is nothing wrong with working hard. There isn’t even anything wrong with climbing the corporate ladder, but if we are investing our life in it, thinking that that is what life is about, we are missing it. And it may even cause us to view ourselves as superior. And the gospel has no class system.

Paul once wrote:

“…the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God’s promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

23 Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.

24 Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. 25 And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

26 For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. 28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God’s promise to Abraham belongs to you.”

Galatians 3:22-29 NLT

There is no class system in God’s Kingdom. Unlike this world, snobbery has no place. Snobbery is part of all of our lives to varying degrees. It is subtle and, in fact, it is sometimes endearing. It usually happens when people start to view their preferences or their life choices as more valuable than others. As one writer wrote:

“…snobbery is immoral. It is unkind, and frequently vicious, and built upon lies about what other people are really like.

And yet I am not convinced that I can give up snobbery so quickly. Because as much as it could harm my daughters, it could also make them Oppenheimers. For after all, snobbery is one of the great midwives of human closeness. Almost nothing I can think of unites two people better than shared snobberies. I never feel more married to my wife than when we enter another couple’s house for the first time and, on seeing that the television is a bit too large, or too prominently placed in the front room, look at one another and—well, I was going to say “arch out eyebrows,” but of course we do not even need to do that. The mere look, the meeting of the eyes, does it all.

When she asks me to describe a town that I have seen on my travels, and I can use the shorthand of, “Well, you know—a lot of above-ground swimming pools,” I am grateful that we are united in our dim view of above-ground swimming pools. Call this a shared aesthetic, call it a shared sensibility, but please do not lie: It is also a shared snobbery. And one reason that we feel so much that we belong together is that while we share much more, we share at least that much…

He goes on to write…

I cannot imagine closeness without some sort of secret handshake.

I do wonder if I can ever change; I cannot decide if I even want to**. I think the best I can hope for is to see my snobbery as a set of neutral, amoral preferences, most of them arbitrarily chosen.** The art critic Dave Hickey has written that good taste is just the residue of someone else’s privilege, and I have to admit that’s right. God—the universe—the perfect good—whatever you want to call the arbiter of moral truth—does not care whether my floors are parquet or covered by wall-to-wall carpeting. That I do care is a fact about me, best confronted and managed. It is not to be exalted, but it cannot be honestly denied.”

God only cares about our preferences and our worldly station because it is useful in connecting with people. But we have to remember that our preferences are just that, preferences. Station does not, in any way, define true value.

In fact, as Christians we are all in the exact same boat…

“22 And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ. 23 God paid a high price for you, so don’t be enslaved by the world. 24 Each of you, dear brothers and sisters, should remain as you were when God first called you.”

1 Corinthians 7:22-24 NLT

Or as the ESV interprets verse 23…

23 You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men.

Our lifetimes are not to be spent trying to show that our tribe or group or fellow snobs are the best. The points for and against in comparison with the worlds value system doesn’t matter. Because Jesus already owns us free and clear.

Mark Oppenheimer again wrote:

“Once you have read (the book) Class it becomes hard not to evaluate a friend’s living room according to Fussell’s simple, handy point system: “Hardwood floor: Add 4 … Vinyl floor: Subtract 6 … Threadbare rug or carpet: Add 8 (each) … Ceiling ten feet high, or higher: Add 6 … Any work of art depicting cowboys: Subtract 3….”

Praise God that we don’t have to worry about a point system or a class system to assign our worth with our Lord.

But I will say that preferences will automatically lump us together with others with similar preferences. All will be snobs about their preferences at least to one degree or another. Make it your goal to enjoy and embrace your preferences and your place in life. And at the same time, fight to understand that in Christ’s kingdom people are not assigned value based on worldly principles. As God said to the priest Samuel, when choosing a king:

7 But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Which is better?

A flat-bed 4x4 1 ton or a Porsche 911?

It is a stupid question, isn’t it. Because it depends on what you are using it for. Are you hauling a load of lumber or trying to impress a girl on your first date?

For you, that might be a very clear analogy. But I would choose the flat bed for both occasions.

Rich, poor, black, white, married, unmarried, redneck, or yuppie, tradesman, doctor, nurse, or engineer, It has nothing to do with what God values. God values us because we are His. Our true value comes from being owned instead of what we own or what place we have in the worldly pecking order.

This is exactly why Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

17 Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the churches. 18 For instance, a man who was circumcised before he became a believer should not try to reverse it. And the man who was uncircumcised when he became a believer should not be circumcised now. 19 For it makes no difference whether or not a man has been circumcised. The important thing is to keep God’s commandments.

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I like dirt bikes and mountain bikes, maybe you like quads. Or maybe you only choose to spend most of your time with people who hike or jog or kayak.

Married people tend to hang out more often with married people and singles with singles. Your earthly station in life has nothing to do with your value or your mission. Obey God, tell others about how awesome Jesus is and try to keep your snobberies in check…

Because to some people an above ground pool says your rich and to others it screams redneck.