

1 CORINTHIANS 9

Paul's Example of Self-Denial

INTRO: Chapter 9 continues Paul's answer to their questions regarding meat offered to idols. To recap, there were two issues at hand: 1) could a Christian eat in an idol's temple (recall that such meals would often times be civic events, not merely religious). 2) could a Christian eat meat sold in the market place, meat that may have been sacrificed to an idol. Paul will give answers to these matters in chapter 10, but first Paul sought to deal with the root of the problem: their attitude. Paul addressed this in chapter 8, rebuking them for boasting in their knowledge (that an idol is nothing), while failing to show love to their brethren whose conscience would not allow them to eat the meat.

Chapter 8 concluded with this declaration from Paul, "if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble." Chapter 9 continues this line of thought, showing how Paul was willing to forego many rights for the good of the gospel, with the implied exhortation that the Corinthians should do the same.

Paul looks to accomplish two things in chapter 9. First, Paul gives his example of self-denial, exhorting others to do the same. Second, Paul defends his credentials as an apostle. "it seems clear that at least some in the Corinthian church did not hold him in very high regard, precisely because in their view he did not stand up for himself. He did not throw his authority around and make people respect him. They were so attuned to the forms of leadership in first-century pagan Corinth, especially those of the sophists and other traveling teachers, that they simply did not understand a preacher like Paul." (D.A. Carson)

VSS. 1-14, PAUL'S BEHAVIOR AMONG THEM.

1. Paul's apostleship (vss. 1-2) There have been

indications earlier in the letter that some in Corinth questioned Paul's authority as an apostle (see 4.1-5, 8-13, 14-21), but Paul now addresses the issue directly.

» Paul begins by asserting that he had the same freedom in Christ that they possessed, but he then moves on to his apostleship, something they did not share.

» Paul offers two proofs of his apostleship: First, he had seen the Lord (Acts 9.1-9). It is significant that when Paul saw the Lord was also the time when he was commissioned to be an apostle (Acts 26.16-18). Second, the Corinthians were Paul's proof of his apostleship. While others had taught in Corinth, it was Paul who took the gospel to that city (Acts 18).

2. Paul's right (vss. 3-11). As a Christian and an apostle, Paul had many rights, yet he chose to not use them. These rights are detailed in this section, but we shouldn't lose sight of the larger goal. Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to emulate his example of love, a love that would forego one's rights for the good of the brethren. To emphasize this point, Paul enumerated many of his rights:

» He had the right to eat and drink (vs. 4).

- This may refer to Paul's freedom to eat meat, a right he was willing to not exercise (8.13). However, given what Paul goes on to say, it seems more likely that Paul is referring to his right to be supported by the Corinthian saints.
- "It may be hard for us at first to understand why this should be thought so serious a charge. But in much of the first-century Hellenistic world, traveling teachers were assessed, in part, by the amount of money they could take in... If Paul would not accept money from

the Corinthians, who wanted to lavish it on him so they could feel good about how important their guru was, many felt it proved he did not really understand the rules of the game, and so he could not amount to much. From the Corinthian perspective, Paul denigrated himself yet further by doing manual labor—something no respectable Hellenistic teacher would have dreamed of doing! The problem of the Corinthian attitude toward money and teaching surfaces even more poignantly in 2 Corinthians 11:7ff.” (D.A. Carson)

- » He had the right to a spouse, but he did not exercise this right (vs. 5)
- » He had the right to refrain from working (vss. 6-11)
 - Recall that while in Corinth, Paul had worked with his own hands as a tent-maker (Acts 18.1-4). However, when Timothy and Silas arrived, it seems that Paul left manual labor and devoted all of his time to preaching the gospel (Acts 18.5). It would seem that Timothy and Silas had brought monetary support from other churches to Paul (see 2Cor 11.8-9).
 - But Paul had a right to be supported, just as other professions had the right for support (vs. 7). Furthermore, Paul appeals to the principle laid out in the Law (vss. 8-10; see Deut. 25.4). Since Paul had sowed spiritual things to them, he had a right to receive physical support (vs. 11).
- 3. Paul did not use this right (vss. 12-14). Paul has established that he had the right to be supported by the Corinthians. He will further make the point in vss. 13-14, appealing directly to the Lord’s teaching (see Luke 10.7; Matt. 10.8,10). But Paul did not use this right. Why?
 - » “we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.”
 - » “Paul’s word for hinder is unusual (here only in the New Testament). It means ‘a

cutting into’, and was used of breaking up a road to prevent the enemy’s advance. Paul had avoided doing anything that might prevent a clear road for the gospel advance.” (Leon Morris)

- » “By preaching the gospel ‘freely,’ that is, without accepting ‘pay,’ he is able further to illustrate the ‘free’ nature of the gospel. Almost certainly this stands over against the itinerant philosophers and missionaries, who ‘peddled’ their ‘wisdom’ or religious instruction (cf. 2 Cor. 2:17; 1 Thess. 2:5–10).” (Gordon Fee)

VSS. 15-27, THE REASON FOR PAUL’S BEHAVIOR

1. Paul’s compulsion to preach the gospel (vss. 15-17). Preaching the gospel wasn’t a job for Paul. It wasn’t a means to earn a pay check. The gospel was much more important, it was a charge he had been entrusted with from the Lord. Paul did everything to be faithful to that charge (see also 4.1-2; Acts 26.15-20).
2. Paul’s true reward (vs. 18). Preaching the gospel is its own reward, and Paul did this without demanding pay so that the gospel would not be hindered. NOTE: Paul has established that teachers of the gospel could / should be paid, and Paul did receive support from churches (2Cor 11.8-9; Phil. 4.15-16). But he would not let payment be the reward for preaching, he would not let money be the determining factor. The gospel was far too important, the salvation of others was at stake! (See Romans 1.16-17)
3. Paul became all things to all men for their salvation (vss. 19-23). This passage is at the heart of Paul’s argument. Recall that the Corinthians had boasted in their knowledge, but their knowledge had led to arrogance and a lack of love for others (8.1). Paul has established his rights, but shown that he has not used those rights. Why? His love for people, his desire that others would receive the truth of the gospel and be saved. Thus, Paul “became all things to all men, so that I may be all means save some.” (vs. 22). Note a few things about

this passage:

- » This passage sheds some light on the matter of “Law”. Paul states that sometimes he lived as “under Law” and sometimes “without law”. His point is simply that depending on the situation, Paul might adhere to Jewish customs or not, depending on what furthered the gospel. An example of this was when he had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16.3) and when Paul agreed to keep a vow (Acts 26.17-26). Paul didn’t do these things as a matter of compulsion, he knew he was not under the Law, but he did them for the furtherance of the gospel.
 - » However, it should be noted that while Paul knew he was not under “the Law”, he was not lawless. “though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ,” (vs. 21). Paul was not at liberty to do anything to get people to listen to the gospel, he was still bound to follow all of Jesus’ commands (see Matthew 28.20). He may not have been under the Law (i.e. circumcision, sacrifice, etc.), but he was still under God’s law.
4. Paul did this for his salvation (vss. 24-27). The salvation of others was not the only thing at stake. Paul’s own salvation was also at stake! That is evident in this passage as Paul states, “I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it,” (vs. 24) and “I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified,” (vs. 27).
- » This passage is a familiar one, one we use to talk about the Christian life in general. While that application can be made, we should respect the original context. Paul’s theme has been the presentation of the gospel, the revoking of individual rights so that others would hear the words of God.
 - » The implied exhortation to the Corinthians was that they needed to be mindful of their brother’s conscience not just for his salvation, but for theirs!
- » The implied exhortation to us is the same! What would we not do for the gospel? Who would we not talk to? What right would we not give up if it meant the gospel would be furthered?