

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MARCH 26TH - 27TH, 2022 // BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS

SURRENDERING RIGHTS (1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-15A)

Paul has been speaking to the Corinthians about their "right" to **eat meat sacrificed to idols based on their knowledge** that idols "have no real existence" (1 Cor. 8:4).

- Paul has asked them to let go of their right to eat that meat for the sake of their weaker brothers.
- As an encouragement to them, **Paul illustrates how he has let go of some of his rights** as an apostle to serve others in ministry.
- Paul begins by asking a series of four questions to which he expected positive responses (vs. 1-2).
- "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle?" - Apostles were **the central leaders of the early church**, and consequently, they possessed certain rights, freedoms, and responsibilities with this office.
- "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my workmanship?" - Paul's apostleship was proven because **he'd seen Jesus, and the testimony of the Corinthians' conversion** was also proof.

AS AN APOSTLE AND LEADER OF THE CHURCH, PAUL HAD THE RIGHT TO ...

1. Receive **food and drink** as he ministered (vs. 4).
 2. Have a **believing wife**, like so many other Christian ministers (vs. 5).
 3. To receive an **income through ministry** and refrain from working for a living (vs. 6).
- Soldiers have their needs provided for, **farmers eat from their produce**, and shepherds drink milk from their flocks (vs. 7).
 - Since this is true in the secular realm, it's true in the spiritual realm- a Christian minister has the "right" to expect material benefits for their spiritual labor.
 - Such was the case in **the Old Testament law** (vs.8), where God commanded His people to not "muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain."
 - This law in **Deut. 25:4** was a command for the **humane treatment of a working animal** by not depriving that animal of food - it was cruel to force an ox to work so that you could harvest grain, but then muzzle him so he couldn't eat of it.
 - Verse 9-10 shows that the law about **oxen revealed a principle with a greater application**. It would be cruel to deprive those who are **ministering spiritually** of their physical needs (vs. 11-12).
 - In the Old Testament, **the priests and Levites** lived off of the sacrifices and offerings that were brought in the temple (vs. 13).
 - In the same way, the **Lord has commanded** (vs. 14, Lk. 10:7-8, Matt. 10:10) that God's servants have the right to receive support from those to whom they minister.
 - This doesn't mean a minister **can't be bi-vocational** (obviously, Paul did this); it just means that it isn't inappropriate or wrong for a minister to **receive financial support**.
 - Paul's point is this - **"I have every right to do each and every one of these things - yet I DON'T make use of these rights!"** (vs. 15a).
 - He had deliberately refused to take financial support from the Corinthians during his ministry to them, and **he had also willingly embraced celibacy**.
 - Paul didn't **HAVE to give up these things**, but he chose to for a greater cause and a higher calling than his own **individual comfort and preferences**.
 - The **path to victory**, fulfillment, Kingdom impact, and the blessed Christian life is **not found in an attitude** that says, "I'm saved, I'm going to heaven, I'm not committing any big sins - so I have the right to live however I want!"
 - Real victory and purpose as a disciple is found in **living close to Jesus**, staying in step with the Holy Spirit, and choosing a life of discipline, commitment, and **sacrifice as we follow God's plan for our lives**.
 - Just because **we have the right** to eat, drink, say, watch, listen to, or do a certain activity- doesn't mean we should.

ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE (1 CORINTHIANS 9:15B-23)

Any boasting **Paul made wasn't because he preached the gospel** - that was a necessity laid upon him by Jesus Himself (vs.15b-16).

- Paul had reason to boast that **he preached the gospel without having to ask** his hearers for financial support (vs. 18).
- He didn't preach to get famous, powerful, or rich - he **shared the gospel because it's true, and he believed** in its power (Rom. 1:16).
- Paul's preaching of the gospel wasn't just a **matter of duty** or begrudging submission or because it was just his job and he needed money (vs. 17) - it was a **matter of his own will**.
- He **WANTED** to give up everything, travel the world, put his life in danger, and preach the gospel, and **he gladly did so without pay!**
- In one sense, **he very well could've played it safe and done the bare minimum**.
- Paul was "free from all," and **yet he willingly made himself a servant to all** so that he might win more people to Christ (vs. 19).
- Paul was free to do what he wanted but **bringing people to Jesus was important to him** than using his freedom selfishly and pursuing a safe, comfortable, and convenient life.
- **"To the Jews I became a Jew"** (vs. 20)- it wasn't necessary for Paul to observe Jewish rituals, customs, and ceremonies.
- And yet, Paul participated in **Jewish purification ceremonies** (Acts 21:23-26) and had Timothy

circumcised (Acts 16:3) - all because it could be **helpful in getting ministry done** among the Jews.

- To the **Gentiles** ("those outside the law"), Paul put aside his Jewish heritage to relate to them in a way they could understand (vs. 21).
- Paul simply wanted others to know Christ- so **he became sensitive to their needs and sought to relate to them**.
- Paul wasn't a chameleon, and **he certainly didn't change or water down his message** or methods with each new situation - he simply sought to serve others by relating to them.
- In his personal life, **Paul lived in a way that didn't unnecessarily offend** either Jews or Gentiles.
- In his ministry, **Paul's sermon to Jews began with the Patriarchs** (Acts 13), and his sermon to Gentiles began with the **Creator God** (Acts 17).
- Even to those who were **"weak" (immature in their faith and weak in their consciences)**, Paul honored them by not doing anything to **unnecessarily offend them** (vs. 22).
- Paul was more than willing to offend people with the gospel, **BUT he wanted to offend them only by the gospel** (vs. 23).
- Paul wanted people to share in the blessings of the gospel, so **he built bridges, not walls**.

RUNNING TO WIN (1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27)

The Corinthians would've been very familiar with the Greek Olympic games but even more familiar with their own local Isthmian games.

- If an athlete truly wants success in their sport, they must train with an **intensity, discipline, and a single-minded commitment**.
- Athletes have to be willing to **give up what's comfortable, easy, and even acceptable** for what's best.
- In the Christian life, not everybody who **seems to be running actually finishes the race** and receives the prize (vs. 24).
- Many will sadly fall away from **Jesus back into the value systems of this world** and prove that they never truly experienced regeneration in the first place.
- **We have to keep running!** We must have a single-minded commitment to live for Christ, **not for our own comfort and worldliness**.
- Just like athletes exercise **self-control in their training, diet, and lifestyle**, so must Christians devote themselves to self-denial (vs. 25).
- Athletes, who compete for "perishable wreaths" are willing to do these things - **but are we willing to deny ourselves to receive imperishable rewards** from Christ?
- Are we willing to **forfeit our rights?** To sacrifice our time, money, and attention to the cause of Christ?
- We're not called to deny ourselves of **worldly comforts and pleasures like the aesthetics**, with no real purpose or aim beyond that denial.
- We don't **"run aimlessly,"** and we're not like **"boxers who beat the air"** (vs. 26).
- We discipline our bodies and bring the desires of our flesh **under the control and Lordship of Jesus** (vs. 27)- the desires of our body aren't to rule over our entire self.
- If my body desires to **drink a beer with my dinner at a restaurant**, but I know in my conscience that doing so **might** harm my Christian witness...
- I've got to get my **own personal desires and my right to do so under the subjection** of the Lordship of Jesus!
- If my flesh desires to post that **snarky, mean-spirited, un-Christlike, profanity-laced political meme** on Facebook...
- I've got to bring my own personal desires and my right to do so under the subjection of the Lordship of Jesus and ask, **"what actions in my life would present Jesus in the best light** to those who don't know Him?"
- If we **don't learn this discipline of sacrifice and self-denial**, we run the risk of being "disqualified" (vs. 27) - losing great spiritual reward in our race.

ARE WE PURSUING JESUS FIRST OR COMFORT FIRST?

- If we are **followers of Jesus**, we have a lot of freedom in Jesus Christ.
- But if we're not willing to **lay aside those liberties as the Holy Spirit might lead us** for the sake of the gospel or the Kingdom of God - then there's something deeply wrong with the state of our hearts.
- Real victory and purpose is found in **choosing a life of glad, whole-hearted, trusting, surrender** - not half-hearted, **begrudging submission!**

ARE WE BUILDING BRIDGES OR WALLS WITH PEOPLE?

- Your faith in Christ (if you live it publicly and purposefully) **might offend some people**. But that should be the **ONLY** thing about your life that offends people.
- Just because you feel like you're right over your **ideologies, opinions, and viewpoints** doesn't give you a right as a Christian to be an unkind jerk (1 Cor. 13:2).
- Are you willing to become **sensitive to the needs of those who disagree with you** and attempt to relate to them in order to win them to Christ?

ARE WE LOOKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE OR SIMPLY PROVE A POINT?

- Paul was willing to **sacrifice, serve, love, and relate to the people God put in his path** all, "for the sake of the gospel, so that he might share with them in its blessings" (vs. 23).
- Is your heart to see people **far from God or different from you** become a member of your spiritual family? Or is it for them to become a defeated adversary that you conquer through your **"knowledge"** (1 Cor. 8:1)?