

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor_chp9)

INTRODUCTION – 1 CORINTHIANS 9

As we have seen, in chapter 7, Paul begins to address issues that the Corinthian believers mentioned in a separate letter to Paul. In chapter 8, Paul addresses questions regarding the liberties of Christians, i.e. the eating of meat from animals that had been offered to idols. Actually, the issue of Christian liberty is a theme that courses through 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1.

- The believer’s liberty to eat meat from animals that had been offered to an idol (8:1-13).
- Paul’s rightful liberties as an Apostle that he voluntarily set aside (9:1-27).
- Flee idolatry (10:1-22).
- Limitation on liberty (10:23-11:1)

So, as Paul wrote the contents of what is now chapter 8 where he addresses the need for the believer to sometimes forego his or her rightful liberty, Paul pauses in chapter 9 to use himself as an example for the Corinthian believers.

PAUL’S EXAMPLE OF FOREGOING HIS LIBERTY IN THE INTEREST OF THE GOSPEL (9:1-18)

1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? 7 Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? 8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. 11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? 14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. 15 But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. 16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. 17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. 18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

In this section, Paul contrasts his legitimate “rights” or “liberties” as an apostle with his demonstrated, but overlooked and ignored, example of self-sacrificial practices. Paul was not

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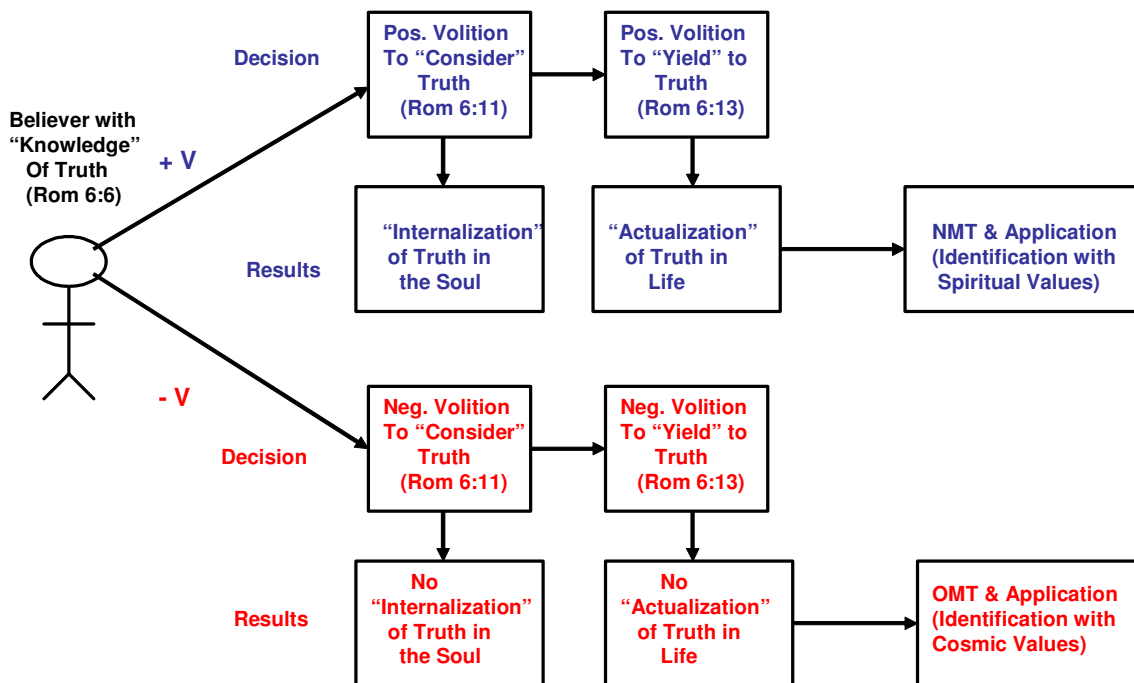
interested in laying claim to the compensation and consideration to which he was rightfully due (v. 15 – “I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case”). Rather, the Corinthians, like us, needed an example of how the “theoretical” looked when it was applied in someone’s life in real situations.

Principle: If there is only theoretical knowledge in one’s soul, one will never be a visible model or example of Christ.

Principle: The ability to grasp the theoretical and employ it in practical scenarios is the essence of wisdom.

Principle: Those who only possess the vocabulary of “self-sacrifice” without knowing how it applies or without any demonstration of it in practical scenarios (e.g. ministry to others, marriage, parenting, Christian leadership, etc.) have not internalized the truth into the various components of the soul’s essence (i.e. self-consciousness, mentality, conscience, volition and emotions) with a resulting effect upon one’s identity. (Note: To the extent others see Christ is the extent to which one has subordinated selfish interests to the interest of glorification of Christ).

Decisions in Phase 2 – Process Flow of Negative & Positive Volition to Truth



Obviously, Paul was operating in the realm of positive volition to all the Truth that he knew, had considered to be truth relevant to him and he had yielded to the truth so that self-sacrificial behavior was the norm in his life. To use my simplistic diagram, Paul was actualizing the Truth into his life situations and thereby demonstrating the new man thinking that he is explaining here in chapter 9. Let’s unpack Paul’s narrative some.

The Rights of an Apostle (9:1-2)

1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

Paul highlights the fact that he is “free” to exercise his Christian liberty – and perhaps even more so since he is an apostle. He has that “authority” or “liberty” as does every believer (1 Cor 8:9 – “*take care lest this authority [Gr. *eksousia* – ἐξουσία] of yours somehow become a stumbling block*”).

Next, Paul asks his readers to remember that he is an apostle and that he met one of the major qualifications – that he had “seen Jesus our Lord.” (See Acts 1:21-22; 9:3-9).

21 "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us--one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." (Acts 1:21-22)

3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." 7 The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. (Acts 9:3-9)

The Corinthian believers were also evidence of Paul’s status as an apostle. Paul had worked signs and wonders among them in the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 12:12).

12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. (2 Cor 12:12)

Even if other men refused to accept Paul’s apostolic credentials, the Corinthians should accept them. They had seen visible proof of Paul’s apostolicity. In 2 Corinthians, Paul will mention this theme repeatedly (e.g. 2 Cor 3:1-3; 5:12; 7:14-16; 8:24).

Paul’s Defense – His Demonstrated Self-Sacrificial Behavior (9:3-12a)

3 My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? 7 Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? 8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. 11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share the right over you, do we not more?

Apparently, Paul was aware that some in Corinth had probably been caused to question his apostolic authority. (He will deal with this issue more extensively in 2 Corinthians 10-13). Here, in verse 3, Paul uses some Greek words that heighten the seriousness of the issue. The word “defense” is a translation of the Greek word *apologia* [Gr. ἀπολογία] which means a “defense” and when combined with the Greek word *anakrino* [Gr. ἀνακρίνω] which means to “question” or “examine” as in a legal proceeding, the sense that is conveyed is that some men were judging him as it were in court.

In the “courts” of the world (i.e. the opinions of men who are “of the cosmos”), one’s claim to a position of power should be accompanied by all of the displays of power and authority. The claimant should exercise all of the rights and privileges afforded that position and by that exercise, the claimant reinforces and validates the claim. A perception and aura is maintained. However, such thinking is 180 degrees at odds with God’s system of thinking.

Paul mentions the “right to eat and drink” and the implication is that it is at the expense of those to whom Paul ministered (vv. 9-11). Next, Paul mentions the right to take a believing wife – something that the other accepted apostles, the half-brothers of Jesus and Peter had done. Evidently, Barnabas had joined Paul in his self-sacrificial actions (v. 6). Paul’s practice was to support himself by tent-making (Acts 18:2-3; 1 Cor 4:12). Of course, this type of behavior was counter to the cosmic thinking that was being exercised by his accusers.

Next, in verses 7-10, Paul uses several illustrations to support his case. I will list them in point-by-point fashion below:

- The soldier does not pay his own salary (v. 7).
- The one planting a vineyard eats some of the fruit of his labor (v. 7).
- The shepherd benefits from the flock that he tends (v. 7).
- The Mosaic Law provides an illustration (in the form of a proverbial expression) of how God intended for the laborer’s physical needs to be met by those who benefited from his labors (vv. 8-9 cf. Deut 25:4).
- The “plowman” (farmer) and the “thresher” (harvester) should benefit from the work he performs (v. 10).

In verses 11-12, Paul extends these illustrations to the laborer in the Lord’s work. The Corinthians had extended financial support to other Christian laborers – probably none other than Peter (cf. 1:12; 3:22; 15:5) and Apollos (1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6; 16:12). Yet, Paul and Barnabas supported themselves so as to go the extra mile to insure that their motivations and the validity of their credentials and ministry was not compromised. Paul did not want to be a stumbling block to anyone who might question his motives in proclaiming the gospel. Had Paul received or demanded compensation, some may have stumbled in their acceptance of the gospel and the phase 2 Truth that Paul communicated by attributing to him false motives.

Paul’s Rights That Were Not Used (9:12b-18)

Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? 14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. 15 But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. 16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. 17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. 18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

Priests who ministered during the Age of the Law were allowed by the Law to partake of a portion of the animal being sacrificed (Num 18:8-32). Even the priests of the pagan religions (with which the Corinthians were more familiar) were remunerated in part by being allowed to have a portion of the sacrifice for themselves. Paul does not quote any Scripture here, but he appeals to a common frame of reference possessed by his readers.

In verse 15, Paul emphasizes the fact that he is not asking that the Corinthians give him money. He would just as soon die as to have someone give him money only to have his credibility discarded.

Paul's reward in preaching was not in material recompense or remuneration (cf. 2 Cor 11:9-10). Rather, Paul's reward was that he offered the gospel without any monetary cost to his hearers and he was able to see the gospel at work amongst those to whom he preached. They were his reward (2 Cor 7:3-4).

9 And when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. 10 As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. (2 Cor 11:9-10)

3 I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. 4 Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction. (2 Cor 7:3-4)

FREE FROM ALL MEN; SERVANT TO ALL MEN (9:19-23)

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. 23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

Here, Paul provides more examples of how he had forfeited his freedom or authority to certain things in order that he might better proclaim truth. When Paul says that he became as a Jew to the Jews so that he might win the Jews, he is referring to the fact that there were occasions when he practiced inconsequential Jewish customs in order to win the Jews. Consider Acts 16:3; 18:18; 21:20-26). Paul knew he was not obligated to perform such traditions, but he also knew he was at liberty to do so if he so desired.

1 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, 2 and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. (Acts 16:3)

18 Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchræa he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. (Acts 18:18)

20 And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; 21 and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. 22 "What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. 23 "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. 25 "But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication." 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them. (Acts 21:20-26)

Paul took his place in the culture of the Gentiles, those without the Law, in order to reach them. In this way, he became as those who were without the Law (cf. Gal 2:11-21).

Paul became "weak" like those who had a "weak" conscience (1 Cor 8). Paul meant that he refrained from exercising his liberties so that he behaved as they did in matters that were inconsequential or related to a non-essential.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINE, FOCUS AND VISION (9:24-27)

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Paul appeals to their common frame of reference again for an illustration in order to emphasize the seriousness of the issue. Paul appeals to the discipline of mind and body and the self-sacrifice of the athletes who competed in the running and boxing events of the Isthmian games. These games were held on the isthmus of Corinth. The winners of these games were given a wreath of celery (early in its history) and pine needles (later in its history). If the winner was from Athens, the Athenians gave the winner an extra 100 drachmas. (In the 5th Century B.C. a drachma was worth about \$25 US, so 100 drachmas would be about \$2500 in today's currency).

Self-discipline is vital to any worthwhile pursuit in life. Without discipline, focus and a vision of the end objective, we flounder in life.