

1st Corinthians Chapters 8-9

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Introduction:

We are moving to some great principles of the faith that cannot be stated in one sentence.

WE ARE GUIDED BY LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE

(8:1) Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols. Yes, we know that "we all have knowledge" about this issue. But while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church.

- This is the second **question** from the church leaders at Corinth. The first one was about marriage and Paul answered the question or questions in chapter seven.
- This question is about eating **food** that has been **offered to idols**. Meat from the sacrifice was burned on the altar and the remainder was sold in the public marketplace. Strict Jews would refuse to purchase or consume this meat but using it was a controversy among believers. Could they attend dinner with their pagan friends if this kind of meat was involved?

Paul Butler observes:

The citizen of Corinth who became a Christian would have a very difficult time trying to continue social amenities among neighbors and relatives who were not Christian. It was a tradition practiced by many pagans to take some of their sacrificial animal's carcass home with them from the ritual and serve it on their own tables to friends and relatives.

An ancient writing describes a feast:

We had some roast pork garnished with loops of sausage and flanked with more sausages and some giblets done to a turn. And there were pickled beets and some wholewheat bread made without bleach. . . . Then came a course of cold tart with a mixture of some wonderful Spanish wine and hot honey. . . . Then there were chickpeas and lupins, no end of filberts, and an apple apiece. The main course was a roast of bear meat. To wind up, we had some soft cheese steeped in fresh wine, a snail apiece, some tripe hash, liver in pastry oats and eggs topped with more pastry and turnips and mustard and beans boiled in the pod.

(2) Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. (3) But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.

- Like people everywhere, some believers at Corinth knew all **of the answers** to this problem. But Paul says they don't **know very much**. The solution isn't with head knowledge -- facts. **God recognizes** those who **love** Him, not those who know all about His laws. So Paul tackles the meat problem from the standpoint of **love**.

IDOLS LACK REALITY

(4) So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. (5) There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords.

- In the head-knowledge department, **we all know** there is just **one God**. The rest are frauds and impostors and yet some people **actually worship** them.

(6) But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we live for Him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life.

- Paul is describing the “We know” list for those who are only fact driven.

NOT ALL BELIEVERS GRASP THE DIFFERENCE

(7) However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated.

- Some **believers** have **idolatry** embedded in their minds and haven’t shaken the myth yet. When they eat this food in question, they believe they are **worshipping** one of these fraudulent **idols**.

WHAT WE EAT DOES NOT GIVE US GOD’S APPROVAL, BUT LOVE DOES

(8) It’s true that we can’t win God’s approval by what we eat. We don’t lose anything if we don’t eat it, and we don’t gain anything if we do.

- Food in itself is really a neutral matter in gaining God’s approval.

(9) But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble.

- All believers have the **freedom** to eat whatever, but not **freedom** to **cause others** to **stumble** back to idolatry.

(10) For if others see you -- with your “superior knowledge” -- eating in the temple of an idol, won’t they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol?

- The answer Paul expects is “**yes.**” The brother with the “**superior knowledge**” is not worshipping an **idol**.

(11) So because of your superior knowledge, a weak believer for whom Christ died will be destroyed.

- The overwhelming goal in this scene is that no one be **destroyed**. Food is so trivial compared to **Christ** coming to earth to **die** for us sinners.

(12) And when you sin against other believers by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, you are sinning against Christ. (13) So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live -- for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble.

- When a believer with “knowledge” encourages others to do what **they believe is wrong**, it is the believer with knowledge who is **sinning against Christ**. Paul’s goal is to avoid **causing** other **believers** to **stumble**.

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At the first reading of chapter nine, Paul appears to change the subject, but instead he teaches some other subjects and uses these truths to reinforce his argument about not using one’s rights to harm others. The green headings tell the story.

PAUL HAS RIGHTS AS AN APOSTLE

(9:1) Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn't it because of my work that you belong to the Lord?

- Paul has not changed the subject from the previous chapter, but is leading his readers into a massive illustration.
 1. Paul states that he is **free**.
 2. He affirms that he is an **apostle**.

3. He declares that he has **seen Jesus** with his **own eyes**.
4. He insists that his readers **belong to Jesus** because of his **work**.

(2) Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you. You yourselves are proof that I am the Lord's apostle. (3) This is my answer to those who question my authority.

- Others may question whether he is an **apostle**, but he is one to the Corinthians. Remember, he was not one of the Twelve that Jesus trained, but a special apostle that was picked especially to be an emissary to the Gentiles.

(4) Don't we have the right to live in your homes and share your meals? (5) Don't we have the right to bring a Christian wife with us as the other apostles and the Lord's brothers do, and as Peter does? (6) Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves?

- As an **apostle**, he had **rights**:
 1. He had a **right to live in their homes** and **share their meals**.
 2. He had a **right to bring a Christian wife, just as the other apostles**. Some students of the Word see this as evidence that Paul was married, but it is very thin evidence. Evidently some or all of the other **apostles** were married and traveled with their **wives**. He also lists the **Lord's brother** and **Peter** by name.
 3. Others had a right to **support** that he and **Barnabas** had been denied.

PAUL HAS A RIGHT TO BE PAID

(7) What soldier has to pay his own expenses? What farmer plants a vineyard and doesn't have the right to eat some of its fruit? What shepherd cares for a flock of sheep and isn't allowed to drink some of the milk?

- Paul fires questions at his readers:
 1. What **soldier** has to **pay his own expenses**?

2. What **farmer plants a vineyard** without expecting some **fruit** for himself?
3. What **shepherd** cares for **sheep** without **being allowed to drink it's milk**?

Life simply doesn't work that way.

(8) Am I expressing merely a human opinion, or does the law say the same thing?

- Is this just human reasoning? No. The **law** of Moses affirms it this truth.

(9) For the law of Moses says, "You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain." Was God thinking only about oxen when He said this?

- Paul quotation translates word-for-word from the Hebrew text:

You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain. (Deuteronomy 25:4 NLT)

Was **God's** interest limited to just the **oxen** or did He have a greater lesson?

(10) Wasn't He actually speaking to us? Yes, it was written for us, so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest.

- Paul affirms that the lesson had a wider application. The workers in the field have a right to a **share of the harvest**.

(11) Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren't we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink?

- Paul then shifts the application to saying that the one who had **planted spiritual seed** was entitled to **physical food and drink**.

(12) If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ.

- The Corinthian Church had supported **others** who **preached** to them. Didn't he **have an even greater right?** But he had **never used** the **right**.

(13) Don't you realize that those who work in the temple get their meals from the offerings brought to the temple? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings.

- Paul now brings some real-life illustrations from the Law of Moses. **William Barclay** offers good insight:

There were five main offerings.

(i) The Burnt-offering. This alone was burnt entire except the stomach, the entrails and the sinew of the thigh (compare Genesis 32:32). But even in this the priests received the hides, and did a flourishing trade with them.

(ii) The Sin-offering. In this case only the fat was burned on the altar and the priests received all the flesh.

(iii) The Trespass-offering. Again the fat alone was burned and the priests received all the flesh.

(iv) The Meat-offering. This consisted of flour and wine and oil. Only a token part was offered on the altar; by far the greater part was the perquisite of the priests.

(v) The Peace-offering. The fat and the entrails were burned on the altar; the priest received the breast and the right shoulder; and the rest was given back to the worshipper.

Mr. Barclay lists a number of other offerings that benefited the priests during the calendar year including the first-fruits of the harvest and the tithe.

(14) In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it.

- **The Lord ordered.** He did not imply, hint, suggest or hope.
- Those **who preach the Good News** are to be **supported by those who benefit from it**. Those who preached had a right.

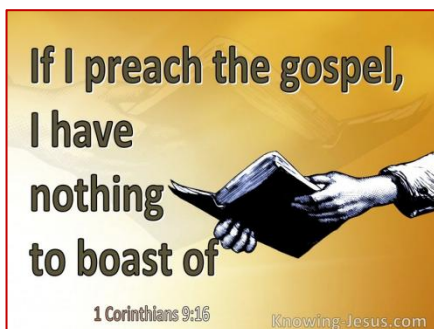
PAUL DID NOT CLAIM HIS RIGHT TO BE PAID

(15) Yet I have never used any of these rights. And I am not writing this to suggest that I want to start now. In fact, I would rather die than lose my right to boast about preaching without charge.

- Paul had **rights** that he had not exercised and he not planning to begin.

(16) Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News!

- **Preaching** is not something that Paul chose to do rather than be a full time tent maker. He cannot **boast** of his choice to be a preacher of the **Good News**. He was **compelled** to do it by **God's** choice of him.



Listen in on the Lord's words to the reluctant Ananias at the time of Paul's conversion:

But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is *My chosen instrument to take My message to the Gentiles and to kings*, as well as to the people of Israel. *And I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.*" (Acts 9:15-16 NLT)

The choice had been the Lord's, not Paul's.

(17) If I were doing this on my own initiative, I would deserve payment. But I have no choice, for God has given me this sacred trust.

- In Paul's special case, he didn't **deserve payment**.

(18) What then is my pay? It is the opportunity to preach the Good News without charging anyone. That's why I never demand my rights when I preach the Good News.

- His pay for **preaching** is the **opportunity** to **preach without pay**.

PAUL'S ADAPTIBILITY REGARDING HIS RIGHTS

(19) Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ.

- In the first verse of this chapter he also described himself as a **free man**. He **became a slave** so he could lead people to **Christ**.

(20) When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law.

- When Paul was among his **Jewish** brethren, he practiced **Jewish** cultural habits. He honored the **Jewish** scruples and lived as they did. He abstained from what they

considered unclean and observed their special days and seasons.

(21) When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.

- Paul's understanding of his role allowed him to be adaptable. Those in his company had no idea that he used to arrest and even have people killed. He was now a saved man, living within the grace of God. He could live outside of the Jewish Law in order to bring them to Christ.
- He kept law -- not the law of Moses but that of Christ. He ate pork, scallops, and did not participate in ceremonial washings before meals.

(22) When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some.

- Paul adapted to the weak. One of the great hindrances to the spread of the Gospel is that people of all races and cultures simply do not try to understand one another in matters not clearly commanded in the New Testament.

(23) I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

- He didn't have personal rigid boundaries that enabled him to exercise his rights. His rights were expressed in winning the lost to Christ.

PAUL WAS LIKE AN ATHLETE

(24) Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!

- When our service to God is viewed as a **race**, it requires self-discipline and strenuous effort. We are to **run to win**.

(25) All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. (26) So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing.

- **Athletes** strive to win a **prize that will fade away**.

(27) I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

- What Paul describes takes **training** and **discipline** and not occasional dabbling.

The overall teaching of chapter nine is that Paul had rights that were genuinely his, but to advance the Kingdom of God on the earth, he surrendered his personal rights for the good of the many.