

1 Corinthians

Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

Section 3: Liberty and the Gospel

Free to Sacrifice

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

Introduction

ILLUS: Hacksaw Ridge Clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LGgEHBxFIQ>

Last week we entered into the third section of 1 Corinthians that focuses on Liberty and the Gospel. Beginning by addressing a question the Corinthian believers had asked concerning meat sacrificed to idols, Paul said that while believers were free to eat of such meat (because in and of itself it was not sinful), the greater liberty given through the gospel was that we are Free to Love our brother and sisters in the faith who would be caused to stumble if one were to partake of the meat sacrificed to idols. His conclusion was, if that was the case, we should never do anything that might cause a brother or sister to stumble. And that to do so, even by something that is in itself not sin, becomes sin against our brother/sister and Christ Himself.

This week we move into chapter 9 where Paul refers to himself in an intensely personal real life example, to illustrate that through the gospel we are Free to Love and that often means we are Free to Sacrifice.

For Paul, “setting aside personal rights and preferences mattered nothing to him if it meant Christ could use him to save just one more person.” (Akin & Merritt, 177)

He begins by teaching us that as believers we are Free to Sacrifice Our Position.

Free to Sacrifice Our Position (1-2)

Paul begins with the first four of 18 rhetorical questions he will ask in the first 18 verses of chapter 9.

Each of these four questions expects an affirmative answer.

Is Paul free? Yes!

Galatians 5:1 (NKJV) — 1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Is he an apostle? Yes!

1 Corinthians 15:8 (NKJV) — 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

Has he seen the Resurrected Christ? Yes!

Acts 9:3–5 (NKJV) — 3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. **4** Then 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?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you

are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

Was the church in Corinth the fruit of Paul’s ministry? Yes!

Acts 18:1, 11 (NKJV) — 1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth ... **11** And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

But it is important to remember what Paul was before Jesus found him on the road to Damascus.

ILLUS: Being educated under one of the most prestigious rabbis of the day and as a Pharisee, Paul had a position of both influence and wealth

And while some in Corinth doubted Paul (remember the disunity – some were of Paul, Apollos, Cephas), there was no room to doubt because without him the church would not even exist!

Their very existence was the “seal” or “certification” of his position in Christ which came only because that in Christ he was Free to Sacrifice his previous position.

But not only that, we are Free to Sacrifice ...

Free to Sacrifice Our Provision (3-14)

Our Provision that is Customary (3-7)

Paul’s defense is an apologetic to those who are judging him. He does this by another string of questions.

The first are related to his ministry among the Corinthians.

The right to be provided food and drink

The right to be married in ministry

The right to be treated as other ministers who were provided for as customary

Then he moves to cultural customary provisions

A soldier going to war

A vinedresser who tends a vineyard

A shepherd who tends the sheep

“These examples are not random but reflect Paul’s view of ... ministry as work in which you have to fight, plant seeds, plough fields, and look after sheep.” (Wilson, 95)

But he moves from provision that is customary to provision ...

Our Provision that is Compensated (8-12)

Paul first makes sure to note that this was not just his opinion but was God’s as well by quoting the OT.

Deuteronomy 25:4 (NKJV) — 4 “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.

I guess in our day, we have to clarify that Paul was not saying that God doesn’t care about the ox!

Matthew 6:26 (NKJV) — 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Context of Deut. 25 goes back to ...

Deuteronomy 24:14 (NKJV) — 14 “You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates.

God uses the illustration of the Ox eating while treading out the grain for our sakes.

Then he uses the illustration of the farmer who plows in hope

The one who threshes the grain in hope

That all who labors do so in hope and the same thing is true for those whose labor is spiritual in nature.

If this has been true for the other pastors the church in Corinth have had, should it not be so – or even more – for the one who planted the church?

And he and Barnabas did not demand or use these rights while in Corinth.

The idea is that Paul and Barnabas willingly sacrificed what they could rightfully claim because

they did not want to hinder the gospel from reaching the Corinthians.

ILLUS: How the issue of money is often used as a reason both in and out of the church as the enemy's way to hinder the truth of the gospel.

"Paul did not want new converts or potential converts to have reason to think he was preaching the gospel for selfish motives." (MacArthur, 204)

This is the first time we see the term "gospel" in this chapter and it occurs eight more times through verse 23.

The point being that the purpose of the liberty we are given by grace through Christ is not centered on us but on the advancement of the gospel!

"... the very nature of the gospel is radically others centered ..." (Taylor, 215)

This means that our "freedom" in Christ doesn't mean what we often think it means. It is not the freedom to claim our rights, but the freedom to lay them down!

Now he moves from the customary and the compensated to Provision that is Commanded.

Our Provision that is Commanded (13-14)

Even in the temple sacrifices, both pagan which he had just discussed in the previous passage and at

the Jewish temple, the ministers were to receive provision for their work.

ILLUS: The Levites did not receive land but were to live off the gifts and offerings of God's people.

Numbers 18:21 (NKJV) — 21 "Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.

The same is true of those who preach the gospel because Jesus commanded it!

Luke 10:7b (NKJV) — 7b ... for the laborer is worthy of his wages ...

Paul even later commanded churches to do it.

1 Timothy 5:17–18 (NKJV) — 17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. **18** For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

"Jesus commanded that God's people take care of God's servants. However, he did not command his servants to always to take what was offered." (Akin & Merritt, 181)

So, Paul has said that because of and for the gospel, we are Free to Sacrifice One's Position, One's Provision, and finally One's Passion

Free to Sacrifice Our Passion (15-18)

Again, he begins by saying that he had not partaken of any of these things that he had the right to, nor is he writing to ask them to offer them now!

Why? Because it is better to die than to claim any right/freedom/liberty that would hinder people from receiving the gospel!

He has nothing to boast in because it was God who called him and gave him a passion for the gospel.

Acts 9:15 (NKJV) — 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

And to not do so would be a curse!

Remember Paul's previous passion?

Acts 22:4–5 (NKJV) — 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, **5** as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

He had not only sacrificed his position, provision, but even his life's passion for the gospel.

And as a believer, we can respond willfully and there is a reward. If unwillingly, there is still a responsibility.

Note that in either case, the expectation is that the gospel will be preached.

“Willing and unwilling is not the difference between cheerfully and reluctantly, but between optional and obligatory ... There is a great difference between what a slave does in obedience to a command, and what a man volunteers to do of his own accord.” (Charles Hodge quoted in Akin and Merritt, 182-183)

“... there is no reason for boasting if Paul preaches because he is compelled to do so ... Paul did not preach the gospel willingly for reward. If he had a choice in the matter and chose to do it willingly, then he might merit a reward.” (Taylor, 217)

Paul, “is more like a slave than an employee ... not ... merely as a slave of Christ but as a slave of those to whom he has been sent to preach.” (Wilson, 97)

Jeremiah 20:9 (NKJV) — 9 Then I said, “I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name.” But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not.

What is then the reward? It wasn't the monetary compensation to which he had the right to receive.

His reward was the freedom not to receive but to reject what would otherwise be his right. His reward was the freedom to willingly be robbed of his right in order to have the opportunity to present the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ without charge and abuse (literally “use up”) the liberty he had in the gospel.

2 Corinthians 11:7–9, 11 (NKJV) — 7 Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? **8** I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. **9** And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself ... **11** Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!

While he had liberty in Christ, that liberty set him free to sacrifice his position, provision, and passion.

Conclusion

“Serving our brothers and sisters matters more than our ‘rights’ to do this or that. Love trumps freedom” ... Love for others is more important than your right to eat whatever you want or earn what you think you deserve.” (Wilson, 94, 96)

ILLUS: Desmond Doss Clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8pPPtJlJs> (0:00-1:08)

“Let us gladly surrender and every right necessary so that the lost may hear unhindered the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Jesus surrendered his rights and privileges to go to the cross. It is a small thing for us, like Paul, to follow in his footsteps.”
(Akin & Merritt, 184)