

1 Corinthians

9:1–27

Introduce

What are ways we think we ought to be treated by others? How can these preferences become “rights” to us? How do we respond when people go against our “rights”? We are going to examine tonight why our rights should not be our main concern in life.

Investigate

Background

In the previous chapter Paul began a larger discussion on the topic of idolatry. His focus there was on the letting go of our freedom for the purpose of other's consciences. The main issue he is addressing is the objection from the Corinthian believers to his prohibition of attending pagan temples. Here he turns away from the prohibition to talk about his freedoms and why he does not take advantages of some of his freedoms.

Explore the Passage

9:1-12a

- What does it seem that Paul is responding to in this passage? In vv. 1-2 what is he responding to? [*questions of his apostolic authority*] In vv. 3-7 what is he responding to? [*his rights as an apostle, specifically his right to be supported through his ministry*]
- What is Paul's response to these arguments? Why would he bring up the example of the Ox?
- Why might they have had these issues with Paul? Understand that Paul was not operating in the same manner as the other apostles. How might this have played into how the Corinthians viewed Paul's apostleship? [*On the one hand Paul was arguing for putting aside rights for the sake of weaker brothers. He also lived out an example of giving up other rights for the sake of others. In Corinth in particular he lived as a tent-maker rather than living off their support. It seems they were used to other apostles living off their support, and bringing their wives on trips. Paul's inconsistency with other apostles may have led them to question his equality with other apostles. He also would eat temple meat with Gentile believers while eating only kosher food with Jewish believers. They may have felt he was being hypocritical. He felt the need to support his apostleship and explain his manner of living.*]

9:12b-18

In the Roman Empire philosophers and wandering missionaries made a living in one four ways: payment for services, support from patrons, begging or by doing other work for income.

- According to these verses what does God consider to be the normal support method when it comes to the funding of ministry? (See also what Jesus says in Luke 10:7.)
- What reasons does Paul give for not taking advantage of this right? Why might accepting support from them have placed an obstacle in the way of the gospel? [*people thinking that they could buy what Paul was offering*]
- What is Paul's ground for boasting? [*that nothing gets in the way of the working of the gospel*]
- Explain what Paul's points are in vv. 16-18. Why are there no grounds for boasting for Paul in the preaching of the gospel? [*God had called him to preach the gospel, so it was not a choice but an obligation.*]

- According to what he says in vv. 16-17 why does Paul preach the gospel? Why would Paul have a reward if he were to preach by his own willful decision? What is Paul's reward? *[To be able to preach to people free of charge when he has full right to ask for support. The focus seems to be on the fact that this would not place an obstacle to the gospel and would result in greater glory to God. The reward he refers to is likely the joy he has in bringing greater glory to God through the free preaching of the gospel.]*
- How can we apply Paul's attitude as displayed here to our lives? What kind of “rights” might we hold on to that could present an obstacle to the working of the gospel? What are other ways we build obstacles to the gospel?

[If you are running out of time you can break here until next week.]

9:19-23

This section is likely a response to their misunderstanding as to why he acts differently with different groups of people.

- How is Paul free from all? In what way does he make himself a servant of all?
- When Paul says that he does things for the sake of “the gospel” what does he mean?
- What are ways that we should follow Paul's example? Why is it difficult for us to do this? How might this be taken too far? How do you identify with people without sacrificing who you are or going against your principles

9:24-27

- How does this paragraph connect with what Paul has been saying? *[We can become so focused on our rights or on our comfort that, like an undisciplined athlete, we fail to reach for the prize.]* In what way were some of the Corinthian believers lacking self-control or discipline in their lives? (Think back to the issue Paul addressed in chapter 8.)
- What is the imperishable wreath we are running for? How is it glorifying to God for us to pursue reward?
- What is Paul's point in saying that he pummels his body and makes it his slave?
- How might Paul be in danger of disqualifying himself? *[Having not run the race in such a way as to have disqualified himself as an apostle of the Lord and to have built an obstacle to the gospel.]*

Discover the Big Idea

What is Paul's focus in this entire chapter? What is it that determines the way he lives? What is it about the gospel that motivates him to live the life of a disciplined servant?

Summary: The focus of Paul's life is the gospel—that is the good news of man as reconciled to God is central to all that he does because only it brings eternal reward.

Respond

- What are some ways that we can fail to run in such a way as to win the prize? How might we run aimlessly or box at air in our lives?
- Why is it difficult to run a consistently disciplined life? How can a focus on our “rights” lead us to an undisciplined life?
- How can a proper appreciation of the gospel give us the desire and motivation to be disciplined servants of the Lord?