



1 CORINTHIANS

1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-27

INTRODUCTION

Paul began this section of his letter (8:1-11:1) by addressing foods sacrificed to idols and emphasized the priority of sacrificing one's rights for the good of the "weaker" brother who could not eat those foods with a clear conscience. Love for others, he said, should take precedent over our "rights". Paul now turns to show how he has modeled this in his own life and ministry.

MAIN POINT

Christians must be willing to endure anything to see the gospel advance.

REFLECT

The transition from chapters eight to nine can be confusing. Paul moves from the subject of foods sacrificed to idols to a defense of his apostleship. There's a reason for this, though. Many in Corinth were doubting Paul's authority and apostleship (4:6-21), and a big reason for this was Paul's unwillingness to exercise his rights as his apostle, particularly his refusal to charge them for his ministry (see 2 Cor. 11:7). As a lowly preacher who financially supported himself through tent-making, Paul was not as impressive as they thought a real apostle should be.

Paul's defense then continues the discussion of "rights" began in chapter eight, and he uses himself as an example of the kind of love he commended in that chapter. He's well aware of his rights. He knows he can charge for his services (v. 4). He knows that Corinth has supported the apostle Peter and his wife (v. 5). From everyday examples (v. 7), from Scripture itself (vv. 8-13), and from Jesus' own mouth (v. 14; Luke 10:7), Paul is well aware of the principle that a laborer deserves his wages.

But as Paul said in the previous chapter, just because a Christian has the right to do something doesn't necessarily mean he should or that he has to. In his case, he willingly refuses to claim any of his rights as an apostle (vv. 12, 15). While he's required to preach, he isn't required to preach free of charge. For Paul, his pay as an apostle is to preach without pay (vv. 16-18)! And he would rather die than change his personal policy (v. 15).

This policy wasn't convenient. It would have been much easier on Paul to accept support rather than do the hard, grueling work of making tents. But he saw it as a way to reach more people. Though Paul is a free man, he will go to any extent necessary for the sake of the gospel (v. 19). He'll live under Jewish practices in order to win Jews for Christ (v. 20). He'll live as a Gentile in order to win them (v. 21). He'll even go to great lengths to see those who are already Christians grow in their faith (v. 22). Paul is so consumed with the advance with the gospel that no right is off-limits. As David Prior writes, "A man who is ready to endure anything for the gospel is not interested in his rights."

It takes discipline to live the way Paul lived. In verses 24-27 we're told to have the same kind of single-minded determination which would characterize an Olympic-caliber athlete. To compete requires agonizing training and denying yourself many lawful pursuits. There can be no half-hearted effort. If athletes go through such rigorous discipline for a perishable reward, how much more should we who have an eternal reward discipline ourselves to see the gospel advance in our own lives and in others'?

- Have you ever withheld your rights out of love for someone? What are ways you can do that this week?
- What implications do verses 19-23 have for evangelism in our day?
- Are you consumed by a single-minded focus on pursuing Christ and making him known? What distractions threaten such focus in your life?

MEMORIZE

1 Corinthians 9:19 – *"For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them."*