



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 9B

Chapter 9:14-27

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- Today we study part three of Paul's teaching on liberty and its limits
 - As you know, this topic runs from Chapters 8-10 and began with the question of whether it was proper to eat meat sacrificed to idols
 - In the course of answering the question, Paul has embarked upon a discussion of the nature of Christian liberty
 - First, Paul taught in Chapter 8 that liberty must be exercised with love for others
 - Secondly, Paul pointed to himself as an example of one who forgoes liberty out of concern for others
 - Finally, Paul defended his decision to forgo receiving financial support against those who claimed it was proof he wasn't an apostle
 - He argued that he still had a right to their support even as he refused it
 - Let's pick up in Chapter 9 where Paul was explaining his refusal to accept support

1Cor. 9:14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

1Cor. 9:15 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.

- As we saw last week, Paul made abundantly clear that those who proclaim the Gospel have an expectation to receive their living from the gospel
 - The minister who is devoted to proclaiming the Good News has every right to receive the support of those he serves
 - As Jesus Himself said when instructing the disciples:

Luke 10:7 “Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.

- Such were Paul and Barnabas, laborers serving God's people and worthy of their wages
- Nevertheless these men chose not to take advantage of this right in Corinth
 - Paul says he used none of these things
 - Notice the word things is plural, meaning he refused donations of support given on his behalf
- Instead, Paul and Barnabas chose to work for their living instead
 - This is a meaningful and commendable choice on Paul's part
 - He took upon himself added burden he didn't have to take
- It's a great reminder to ministers today that forgoing financial support is an option we may take when circumstances warrant
 - But we do so only when it's the better course for the sake of the Gospel

- But as we learned last week, a minister's choice in this matter has no bearing on our collective responsibility to offer support
- We are not to muzzle the ox we depend upon for our spiritual nourishment
- In Paul's case, he made his decision for two reasons
 - First, by forgoing his personal liberty he was showing love for the church by avoiding placing a financial burden upon them
 - Paul alludes to this purpose in this chapter
 - But he explains it most clearly in another letter, 2 Corinthians
 - In that letter, Paul once again reminds the church of his choice to forgo support and says it was intended as a benefit for their sakes

2Cor. 12:11 I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.

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

2Cor. 12:13 For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

2Cor. 12:14 Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.

- Sarcastically, Paul asks the church to “forgive him” for not placing a financial burden upon them
 - Apparently his refusal to accept their support was interpreted by the church as an insult, as if Paul was treating them as inferior or poor by refusing support
 - Paul says they should have perceived it as a blessing
 - Because he was trying not to be a burden upon the church
- There was a second reason Paul chose not to restrict his personal liberty in Corinth
 - In v.15 Paul says it would be better for him to die than to start receiving their support
 - Why was Paul so adamantly opposed to being paid for his ministry work in Corinth?
 - Paul answers saying that he didn't want his boast to be made empty
 - The boast he's speaking about is the claim that Paul served the church without receiving reward for his service
 - Had the church turned around now, as a result of Paul's letter, to begin providing financial support, it would have made Paul's boast empty
 - Paul didn't want his reward on earth...he was looking for a heavenly reward

1Cor. 9:16 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.

1Cor. 9:17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

1Cor. 9:18 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.

- Paul explains that merely preaching the Gospel in Corinth was not a cause by itself for the Lord to reward him
 - Paul says he couldn't expect the Lord to reward Him merely for spreading the Gospel because Paul was under compulsion to do so
 - When the Lord appeared to Paul on the road, the Lord commanded Paul to preach
 - Here's how the Lord explained His plan for Paul

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Acts 9:16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

- Paul was under compulsion to serve God
 - He might have refused, in the manner of Jonah
 - But woe to such a man, as Paul himself acknowledges
 - So how could Paul boast in what was already expected?
 - It would be like an employee bragging about showing up for work everyday
 - Or Ken bragging about showing up for church every Sunday
 - That's already expected, so we can't boast about it
- In v.17 Paul says if he were preaching voluntarily, then he might have reason to brag and receive reward
 - But Paul was arrested on the road against his will, and he was assigned this mission of suffering and sacrifice against his will
 - Paul didn't ask for these things, and he certainly didn't want for them when he was still Saul persecuting Christians
 - Paul says the Lord entrusted Paul with a stewardship, a caretaker responsibility, to deliver the Gospel to the Gentiles
 - The Lord stepped into this life, changed him and gave him a new mission in life
 - So when Paul preached the message of the Gospel and suffered persecution, he was just doing what he was told
 - Nevertheless, Paul still wanted to have something to boast about when he stood before Christ to receive his judgment
 - And so that brings us to the second reason Paul determined not to receive financial support

- In v.18 Paul says his reward will come from his decision to preach the Gospel at no charge
 - He set aside his liberty, choosing not to make full use of his right to receive support
 - And he did this to show love to the brethren and in the hope of being more effective in the ministry of the Gospel

1Cor. 9:19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.

1Cor. 9:20 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;

1Cor. 9:21 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.

1Cor. 9:22 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.

1Cor. 9:23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

- Paul declares though he was free from all men
 - When he says he was free, he means he had the same liberty all men receive in knowing and following Christ
 - He was free from the restrictions of the Mosaic Law
 - He was free from the judgment of men concerning righteousness
 - He could make decisions about how to live without worry for how those decisions impacted his position before the Lord
 - Nevertheless, Paul voluntarily assumed additional certain burdens and restrictions to be as effective as possible in ministry
 - For example, Paul says when he was ministering among Jewish people, he assumed a lifestyle that was pleasing to the Jew
 - In assuming these restrictions, Paul voluntarily set aside some of his liberty
 - He made this choice to appease the Jews and create a cultural connection with them to improve his opportunity to present the Gospel
 - And around Gentiles, Paul adopted a different lifestyle, one that probably made Paul a little uncomfortable and may have even offended him a little
 - Here again, Paul was making lifestyle choices that restricted his liberty
 - But he made these decisions to win men to the Gospel, whether Jew or Gentile, whether strong men or weak men
 - Notice Paul makes clear that these choices weren't a requirement...they were choices he made to earn reward
 - He says he wasn't under the Law of Moses even when he lived like the Jews... it was his choice

- And when he lived like a Gentile, he knew better than to think he was living without any law
 - He knew was always under the law of Christ
 - But he did these things for the sake of the Gospel and so that he may become a partaker in it
 - Obviously, Paul was already saved by his faith alone
 - So when he says he was working to become a partaker of the Gospel, he means he wished to share in the reward given to those who preach the Gospel
- If we study Paul's example carefully, we arrive at some basic principles for how we may set aside our own liberty with an eye toward our eternal reward
 - First, our attitude in life should be how can I accommodate another through self-restraint
 - So many Christians seem only interested in showing off their liberties
 - But we see Paul always looking for ways to restrain his freedom
 - So should we focus our attention on how we can restrain our freedoms rather than allowing them to rule us
 - Secondly, Paul restrained himself for specific purposes related to the Gospel
 - He was seeking to advance the purposes of the Gospel in love
 - Whether Paul moved left or right, front or back, he made every lifestyle decision with an eye toward how it impacted his effectiveness in ministry
 - Thirdly, Paul never placed undue emphasis on certain rules
 - Paul knew he wasn't bound by the Mosaic Law, but he always remembered he was accountable to the Law of Christ
 - Likewise, we must be willing to adopt or cast off any rule of life if it helps us win souls for Christ while always obeying Christ's commands
 - Any self-restriction not directly related to advancing the purpose of the Gospel is nothing more than self-righteousness
 - We can't allow any restriction to become an end in itself
 - Do whatever you do for eternal purposes
 - Finally, we see how Paul used his self-sacrifice as opportunity for the Lord to bless him
 - Paul wasn't the only man living under compulsion
 - We all have certain obligations, and we fulfill those expectations as a matter of duty
 - If we merely do what we are already commanded to do, then a reward isn't in the cards
 - But when we decide voluntarily to use our life to serve the Lord, then we are working to gain reward
 - We can't think that assembling at church regularly, saying our prayers at night, and staying out of trouble will gain us reward

- Those things are expected, because we've been commanded in scripture to do those things
 - Reward comes from voluntary service to God, Paul says
- And Paul ends this chapter on the topic of personal reward

1Cor. 9:24 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.

1Cor. 9:25 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.

1Cor. 9:26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

1Cor. 9:27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- This is the second time in this letter that Paul has turned the church's questions to the issue of a Christian's eternal reward
 - Paul uses an analogy of a sports competition to explain to the church in Corinth why every Christian has good reason to exercise self-control
 - Paul says every Christian is running in a great foot race
 - Our Christian walk of life is the race, to mix my metaphors
 - Every Christian is running, but Paul says only one receives the prize
 - Paul is make a comparison to the ancient Olympic games of Greece where runners competed for honor
 - There was no second or third place awarded in the Greek games
 - You had one winner and the rest were losers
 - So Paul commands the church to run your Christian race in such a way that you may win your race
- As we continue to examine this analogy, we need to understand both the similarities and differences of the comparison
 - For example, in the Greek games, an athlete competes against other runners for a singular prize
 - But in the Christian race, we are not competing against other Christians but against ourselves
 - Our performance will be compared to what we might have done with the opportunities the Lord gives us
 - And Paul explained that our opportunities have been prepared by the Lord so that we might please Him

Eph. 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

- And Jesus Himself taught in Luke 12:48 that to whom much is given, much is expected
- So we compete against our own opportunities
- Secondly, in the Greek games, there was but one prize for each race, but in the Christian race, the prizes are endless
 - Remember earlier in Chapter 2 Paul said that no eye has seen nor ear heard nor could men even imagine all that the Lord has prepared for those who love Him
 - So don't be jealous of another Christian who lives a life of excellence
 - Rather, we should celebrate their faithfulness and seek to emulate it
 - They have won their prize, and we may yet still win ours
- And that's Paul's advice to this church and to us as well
 - In v.24 Paul says run your Christian race to win
 - Just like an athlete that disciplines his body during training so he will compete well, we must exercise self-discipline to please the Lord and earn our reward
 - If an athlete is willing to endure great physical pain to arrive at a perishable wreath, then certainly we can endure a loss of freedom to earn an imperishable reward
 - So Paul exercised sound judgment, careful strategy and enormous self-discipline to ensure he could win the contest
 - Using more sports analogies, Paul says he ran with specific goals, not aimlessly
 - He boxed so that he hit his target, he didn't just beat at the air
 - Paul lived his life concerned with being disqualified from sharing in the rewards that he might otherwise receive for preaching the Gospel
 - Likewise, we must make strategic decisions about how to exercise our liberties
 - We must learn the lessons Paul has given us in these examples
 - We recognize that all of us have liberty to live in many ways, but we must consider each decision with an understanding that we are planning a race
 - That race has the opportunity to bring us reward or bring us loss
 - We must think strategically
 - We must be willing to exercise self-control
 - And all these things we do so that the purposes of the Gospel will be accomplished in our choices