



VERSE BY VERSE MINISTRY
INTERNATIONAL

TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 9A

Chapter 9:1-15

P.O. Box 702107
San Antonio, Texas, 78270
210.319.5055

©2013. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
All rights reserved

versebyverseministry.org/lessons/1corinthians-2013-lesson-9a

- Last week we began a three chapter section on the proper exercise of Christian liberty
 - Paul is on this topic because the church in Corinth asked Paul to render his judgment on a certain question
 - The question seems to have been whether Christians may eat meat sacrificed to an idol
 - More specifically, the church wondered about two specific issues
 - Could a Christian continue to attend pagan temple meals, which were like restaurants or country clubs today
 - And secondly, could a Christian buy meat in the local market, called an agora
 - Paul will eventually answer those specific questions, but in the course of answering, he is teaching on a much larger principle, which is Christian liberty
 - In Chapter 8, Paul explained that Christians cannot exercise their freedoms with disregard for how our behavior affects others
 - If our freedoms injure others, then we are sinning
 - Likewise, if our lifestyle choices lead immature Christians to violate their conscience, then we sin as well
 - And even worse, we lead those other Christians to stumble, that is to sin against their own conscience
 - Understanding this principle is the most important goal of Paul's teaching in these chapters
 - Because even if he set them straight on the question of meat and idols, what would do when they encounter the next situation?
 - They would be lost
 - So the main goal of Paul's teaching in these chapters is to equip the church with an understanding of basic principles and biblical truths
 - And through this equipping, they will have what they need to exercise their liberty properly in every situation
- As we left Chapter 8, Paul summed up the principle with a simple but powerful personal statement

1Cor. 8:13 **Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.**

- Paul is using the question of eating meat sacrificed to idols as an example to make his larger point
 - We can generalize Paul's statement this way:
 - If enjoying my Christian liberty leads my brother or sister into sin, then I will gladly forgo that liberty out of love for that brother or sister
 - We should be willing to set aside our liberties because our highest goal as a Christian is to demonstrate love
 - Love for God and love for our neighbor

- Liberty is a privilege of our faith, not an absolute right
- So we cannot make the pursuit of our liberties our priority when there are more important values (like love) at stake
- As we move into Chapter 9, Paul must continue challenging the Corinthian church to think differently about their liberties
 - Greek society respected strength and status, but these values can come into conflict with Christian values of humility and self-sacrifice
 - So in this situation, Greek culture was working against the goals of Christian maturity
 - So Paul is working hard to explain why this Greek church must be willing to set aside Greek goals
 - And in their place, the church needed to adopt a Christ-like perspective
- Lastly, Chapter 9 will also find Paul once again defending his apostolic authority in the face of his enemies' attacks in his absence

1Cor. 9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

1Cor. 9:2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

- Did you notice Paul's defensive posture? He begins with four rhetorical questions
 - First, Paul asks am I not free? Am I not an apostle?
 - Paul is asking the church to consider his own rights and privileges as an apostle
 - Was Paul not free to enjoy Christian liberty like the rest of the church? Yes, he was
 - And more than that was Paul not an apostle, which was a unique and esteemed position in the church? And the answer is yes again
 - These question set up the two purposes of this chapter
 - Paul will use himself as an example to demonstrate how a Christian must set aside liberty on occasion to show love to others
 - But secondly, Paul is at work again to defend his authority as an apostle to those who would try to use Paul's self-restraint against him
 - Paul's next two questions continue on the question of his authority
 - He asks did he not see the Lord Jesus Christ?
 - He's referring to his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus
 - It also reminds us that the fundamental requirement to be considered an apostle was to see the Lord in person
 - And if that weren't enough to demonstrate Paul's authority, he points to the founding of the Corinthian church as proof of his position and authority
 - As we learned back in Chapter 1, the founding of the Corinthian church was a self-evident miracle

- Had the Lord not been at work through Paul, he could never have established such a large church out of nothing in a place as corrupt as Corinth
 - So Paul says in v.2 that even if some doubted his apostleship, certainly the Corinthians should know the truth
 - The very existence of this church was a seal or stamp of authenticity to prove Paul's claims
- Why does Paul open this chapter sounding so defensive, with this series of questions? He is setting up his argument for the rest of the chapter
 - Paul is referring to the time he and Barnabas lived and worked among the Corinthians
 - They made decisions at times to forgo the rights and privileges of apostles
 - They set aside their own comfort, ease and even their status as apostles in order to become a blessing to the Corinthians
 - For example, they enjoyed marketplace meat when living among the Gentiles, but avoided it when living among Jews in the city
 - They refused material support though they had rights to expect it
 - So Paul is using himself as an example of how one sets aside liberty out of love for another believer
 - Paul refused certain privileges out of concern for the needs of the church in Corinth
 - And yet his right to have these things was never in doubt, proving it was a self-sacrifice on Paul's part
 - And if an apostle can forgo personal liberty at times, then certainly every believer should be willing to do the same
 - Paul is also addressing his critics who have charged that his self-restraint was evidence that he and Barnabas weren't actually apostles at all
 - Because the Greek culture associated authority with strength and power, they interpreted any sign of weakness as evidence that authority was lacking
 - So Paul must defend his authority before he can explain his choice to set aside his Christian liberty

1Cor. 9:3 My defense to those who examine me is this:

1Cor. 9:4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink?

1Cor. 9:5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

- Paul offers his defense to those who examine him, which means to those who put me on trial
 - Paul asks, do the the apostles not have a right to eat and drink or get married?
 - This is such a clever way to defend himself
 - Paul's critics were pointing to Paul's refusal to accept monetary support as proof he wasn't an apostle

- After all, they would say, other apostles relied exclusively on support
 - They walked away from their fishing nets and tax collector booths
 - They depended entirely on the church for income
- But Paul chose at times to continue working in his profession as a tent maker
 - So his critics argued that if Paul were truly an apostle, he would live on support like other apostles
 - His refusal to accept support was evidence they claimed that Paul wasn't truly an apostle
- But instead of beginning his defense by explaining his decision to work for his income, Paul begins with questions of food and drink and marriage
 - Paul asks if he has a right to these things, which we know are things that he most certainly had a right to expect
 - Food and drink and even marriage are basic rights of every Christian
 - These things don't come and go based on our authority
 - Therefore, when Paul chose not to eat or drink certain things, he didn't forfeit his authority did he?
 - And when Paul chose to forgo marriage in order to serve Christ, he wasn't less an apostle was he?
- Notice in v.5 that Paul mentions other apostles took wives
 - In particular, Peter was married we learn here
 - As a passing note, this tells us what we already know – that no man is required to forgo marriage as a condition of serving the Lord
 - Notice however that Paul qualifies that right...it must be a believing wife
- Paul cleverly leads his reader into an obvious conclusion: Paul had the right to such things and his decision to set aside that right didn't diminish his authority as an apostle
 - So then, Paul now moves in v.6 to the heart of his critics' accusations, concerning the issue of Paul working and refusing the church's support

1Cor. 9:6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?

1Cor. 9:7 Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?

- Paul asks if his critics think that only he and Barnabas are without the right to stop working?
 - Paul is demonstrating the nonsense of his critics' argument
 - Paul has made clear that he qualifies as an apostle according to the standard, and yet his critics say he must still be working because he is not entitled to their support
 - So Paul asks if only he and Barnabas are the only apostles required to keep working in this way

- Paul is refuting those who claimed Paul and Barnabas were forced to work because they weren't qualified to be supported by the church
 - Regardless of whether Paul or Barnabas chose to accept such support, they always retained a right to receive it
- So beginning in v.7 Paul teaches that financial support was something he and Barnabas had just as much right to accept as any other minister of the Gospel
 - Paul uses three examples of life to demonstrate the concept, followed by a support from scripture
 - His first example is of a soldier who enlists in military service
 - The soldier expects their income and other needs be met by that service
 - A soldier isn't expected to find work on the side to support his family while trying to fight for his country in the meantime
 - Rather, the soldier's time is focused on serving, because he knows that he need not divert any of his time and energy on making a wage
 - Secondly, a farmer with a vineyard would never think to buy grapes from the local agora
 - Instead, that farmer would be expected to obtain his grapes from the harvest of his own hands
 - His work has given him the right to expect a return from that effort
 - Finally, a shepherd would never purchase milk at the agora
 - He would obtain the milk from his own flock, which he maintains
 - He looks to his own for his support
 - By these three examples, Paul gives us three principles that should guide our understanding of why we support those who minister to the church
 - First, we should want their undivided attention focused on their ministry service
 - Just as we want our soldiers focused 100% on defending our nation
 - Imagine if our soldiers must spend half their time working at Walmart rather than being paid for their military service?
 - It might save us a few bucks in taxes, but what would we lose?
 - How prepared would our military be and how safe would our nation be?
 - Likewise, Paul is asking if someone devoted to the Gospel is expected by his critics to spend their time working to make ends meet instead of teaching the Bible?
 - Secondly, the example of the farmer illustrates that the work of ministry should be the source of a minister's supply
 - He is investing time and energy in growing up a field of fruit
 - And that fruit in turn should be a blessing for that one who worked so hard to produce it
 - If a vineyard owner never reaps a harvest for his work, he will eventually seek for better ground

- Thirdly, the example of the shepherd illustrates that the supply comes from within a shepherd's own flock
 - On any given hill, we might find many flocks and many shepherds
 - But each shepherd received the milk he needed from within his own flock
 - We should no more expect one shepherd to provide milk to another than we should expect our ministers to receive support from other flocks
- Not wanting to rest on these examples alone, Paul then turns to scripture prove his point

1Cor. 9:8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?

1Cor. 9:9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He?

1Cor. 9:10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.

1Cor. 9:11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

- In v.8 Paul says he isn't speaking merely on the basis of human judgment, because the word of God teaches these principles as well
 - In Deuteronomy 25:4, we find it written that a farmer in Israel may not muzzle his ox while the ox is threshing
 - Threshing was a process of separating the grain seed from the husk that surrounded it
 - The best way to accomplish this was to lay stalks of grain on a flat hard floor
 - Then a large, heavy animal like an ox would be led to trample over the stalks of grain
 - The grain seeds were strong enough to remain intact under the pressure of the ox hooves
 - But the hooves would separate the chaff away from the grain seeds
 - So the ox would be tied to a pole and made to walk in a circle around the pole
 - The grain stalks would be thrown in the path of the ox
 - While the crushed grain would be swept out of the circle after the ox passed over it
 - This process would go on for hours at a time, with the ox moving in a circle around this pole for the whole time
 - Obviously, the ox would get hungry after working for so long
 - So occasionally the ox might stop and bend down to eat some of the grain under its feet
 - If a farmer wanted to prevent the ox from eating the grain, he could place a muzzle on the mouth of the ox

- But in the Law, the Lord commanded that the sons of Israel not muzzle the ox while it was threshing
- And now in v.10 Paul explains why that Law found its way into the commandments given to Israel
 - Paul says the Lord's chief concern wasn't the welfare of oxen
 - It was for the sake of His people
 - First, it was beneficial to the farmer that his ox was well-fed and strong while it performed the work
 - The little bit of grain the animal might eat provided the energy needed for that animal to thresh the grain for the farmer
 - If the animal was weak, the grain wouldn't be harvested
 - So to starve the animal in the hope of saving a little grain was penny wise and pound foolish, as the saying goes
 - More importantly, Paul says this law was always intended to be a useful illustration of the very principle Paul was teaching now concerning supporting ministers
 - Like the ox, a workman should expect to give his work in the hope of receiving something of benefit in return
 - Workmen share in what they work to produce, just as the ox shared in the grain it helped to glean
 - It's not a burden; it's their right
 - Then in v.11 Paul makes the application to his own ministry
 - If he worked to produce spiritual benefits in the church, then certainly he should have right to material blessing in return
 - The spiritual gains are always more valuable than material gains
 - Paul gave them the Gospel and the knowledge of God, something of eternal, immeasurable value
 - And all he should expect in return was modest monetary support, which is something of passing, unimportant value by comparison
- So Paul certainly had a right and liberty to receive his full-time support from the church, and his refusal to accept that support was not reason to doubt his authority as an apostle
 - So why did Paul forgo this privilege of ministry?
 - Now Paul is ready to return to the main issue of exercising personal liberty, using himself as an example

1Cor. 9:12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

1Cor. 9:13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?

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.

- Paul asks the church if other, lesser ministers have received support from the church, then didn't apostles like Paul and Barnabas also have the right to expect such things?
 - The answer is obviously yes, nevertheless Paul and Barnabas did not use their right
 - Paul is referring to the way Paul and Barnabas made a decision to work to support themselves while they were in Corinth
 - As they worked to support themselves, they avoided burdening the church with the need to support them
 - Paul says in v.12 that they chose this path because they felt to do otherwise would be a "hindrance to the mission of the Gospel"
 - Perhaps Paul felt that if Paul had asked for support in the beginning of his ministry, the Greek church would misunderstand Paul's motives
 - Perhaps other false teachers were using the proclamation of the Gospel as a means of gain, so Paul wanted to distance himself from such men
 - Whatever his reason, Paul made a decision to set aside one of his rights out of love for God and the believers in Corinth
 - In vs.13-14 Paul reiterates once again that service to God is an honorable profession that carries the natural expectation that those who benefit from that service should support those workmen
 - In fact, Paul goes a step further and places a command on the congregation
 - Notice in v.14 Paul says the Lord commands that those who proclaim the Gospel receive their living or income from that work
 - Paul isn't saying this is a command on the minister, but rather it is a command to the congregation
 - The congregation is required by the Lord to provide gifts of support to meet the needs of their ministers
 - And that requirement on the congregation exists regardless of whether in the end the minister chooses to accept those gifts
 - Even in cases like Paul's where the minister chooses to forgo support to set an example, the congregation is still commanded by the Lord to make it possible for the minister to earn his living by that work
- In v. 15 Paul reminds the church he never made use of these things
 - He purposely left money on the table, so to speak
 - The choice to cease working should be a privilege every minister has a right to enjoy
 - But that privilege is not a requirement

- And if a minister, like Paul, continues to work out of concern for others, then it doesn't delegitimize his authority
 - No more than a refusal to eat or drink or marry would become an indictment
 - But neither does it remove the congregation's responsibility to support that minister
- At the end of this section, we come to the power of Paul's example
 - If an apostle like Paul, the position of highest honor in the church, was willing to forgo his own livelihood for the sake of his love for the church
 - Then certainly the exercise of our liberties and rights and privileges must always be conditioned on the same standard of love
 - Furthermore, when someone exercises self-restraint of liberty, it isn't a sign of weakness or a reason to question their liberty in the first place
 - On the contrary, it's a sign of their spiritual maturity and a demonstration of self-sacrificial love
- In v.15 Paul makes clear he isn't mentioning these things now as a subtle way of gaining the church's financial support
 - He says he isn't writing to have this done so for him now
 - His motive isn't to obtain the money in the end
 - If he had wanted support, he could have had it at any time
 - Instead, he wanted the heavenly honor of receiving the Lord's praise for having given up something he could have so that he could demonstrate love for the church
 - Not wanting to be a burden on the church, Paul chose to work
 - That choice was a demonstration of love, not of weakness
 - And this standard of conduct is the standard the entire church is called to emulate
 - We can get the sense of how important this principle is when you consider Paul's last words in v.15
 - Paul says he would rather die than to have someone begin supporting him when he didn't want it
 - That statement suggests that Paul knew he would be rewarded in the kingdom for this sacrifice, and he didn't want to lose that reward
 - He would rather be rewarded in the kingdom than to take his reward here and now
- That's the standard we want to mirror, because that's the standard the Lord demonstrated for us