

1 Corinthians 9:1-27
Session 11– Study Notes
Rev. Jan Cook

1. Chapter 9 looks like the beginning of a long digression. Paul begins defending his apostolic practices, particularly his refusal to accept financial support from the Corinthians, and the problem of idol meeting seems to drop from view until 10:19.
2. Paul has not by any means left behind the problem of food sacrificed to idols; instead, he is taking a new tack, reframing the perspective from which the Corinthians should view the issue.
3. In chapter 8, Paul calls upon the strong at Corinth to limit their freedom for the sake of the weak.
4. Paul's policy of deferring to the superstitious scruples of his most ignorant converts has led some of the Corinthians to question the authenticity of his apostleship. The doubt is reinforced by Paul's practice of supporting himself by working as a tentmaker.
5. Paul's slavish pursuit of a low-status occupation, taken together with his vacillating inability to take a consistently "strong" line on the freedom to eat, has suggested a disturbing conclusion to the Corinthians: *Perhaps Paul is not really a legitimate apostle at all. If he were legitimate, surely, he would act in ways more dignified and more demonstrative of his own authority.*
6. It is important to remember that Paul did not fit readily into any recognizable job description within the culture of the Corinthians. Paul was simply a free-lance missionary.
7. Within this cultural setting, there was an ongoing debate about the appropriate means of economic support for a philosopher. Four basis models were advocated, each with its distinctive drawbacks.
 - The philosopher could charge fees for his teaching as the Sophists did: they were often accused of greed and manipulating their pupils.
 - He could be supported by a wealthy patron as the "resident intellectual" in the patron's household, often with the task of educating the family's children.
 - He could beg on the streets, notoriously practiced by the Cynic philosophers.
 - He could work at a trade to support himself.
8. Paul decided to follow the fourth model, working with his hands to earn his living, supplemented by occasional gifts from some churches, particularly in Philippi. His was an unusual choice and highly controversial.
9. The argument has two phases
 - In verses 1 – 14, he argues that he is a real apostle and, therefore, has every right to receive financial support from the Corinthians.
 - Then, in verses 14-23, he explains that he has renounced these legitimate rights "for the sake of the gospel" by offering the gospel free of charge and identifying with lower-status members of the community.
10. Thus, by choosing "not to make full use of my rights (exousia) in the gospel," Paul confirms rather than denies his apostolic mission. At the same time, Paul's self-description serves as a model for the conduct he is urging upon the strong like him;

11. The argument targets those members of the Corinthian church who enjoy greater wealth and social prestige, who also are most enamored of their freedom to do what they like: to them, Paul says, in effect, “*No, for the sake of the gospel, you must exercise self-restraint.*”
12. By sandwiching chapter 9 in between chapters 8 and 10, Paul causes readers to think about the idol meat issue in light of the apostolic example and vice versa.
13. 1 Corinthians 9 is an artful piece of rhetoric that accomplishes two purposes simultaneously:
 - Explaining Paul’s controversial renunciation of his rights
 - Suggesting that renunciation as a model to be imitated.
14. The opening of chapter 9 should be heard as a direct reflection of the conclusion of chapter 8. In Chapter 4, there was a suggestion that the Corinthians were judging Paul for his lack of rhetorically polished wisdom: here, in Chapter 9, the disputed points seem to be related to his lifestyle and his means of self-support.
15. Paul begins his defense with another barrage of rhetorical questions. The key word here is *exousia* (authority, power, right): “*Do we not have the right, authority, to eat and drink?*”
16. In principle, Paul has the right to eat what he wants, be accompanied by a wife like the other apostles, and be financially supported by the churches he founded. Yet, as the Corinthians already know, he does not do any of these things. Therefore, the very posing of the questions suggests the important distinctions between having a right and exercising it.
17. In verse 6, Paul finally focuses on the most troublesome issue in his relationship with the Corinthians: financial support. The normal pattern is that apostles are supported by their churches. Paul and his former mentor, Barnabus, are the exceptions to the rule.
18. To show this is an anomaly, Paul spins out three analogies, still in the interrogative mode. But he saves the most significant support of his resistance until the end: Jesus commanded that the gospel proclaimers should get their living by the gospel.
19. Verse 15 is the dramatic climax and pivot point of the chapter.
20. Despite all the impressive reasons for receiving support, including the command of the Lord, Paul will take no money because he cannot claim to be working voluntarily as an apostle. His service is rendered to God, not willingly but because he has been entrusted with a commission. The language here suggests once again the image of a slave as a steward.
21. His renunciation of rights allows him to share in the pattern of Christ’s own sacrificial action and thereby paradoxically to share in the life-giving blessings of God.
22. Everything that Paul does is aimed at winning as many people as possible to the gospel. He will adapt his behavior (not his message!) in whatever way is necessary to achieve that end.
23. Paul’s slavery to Christ is expressed in the form of submitting himself in various ways to the cultural structures and limitations of the people he hopes to reach with the gospel. (Better to love than be right?)
24. Paul actually took on the lifestyle and condition of the weak. This means two things:
 - He accepted for himself their stricture against eating idol meat.

- He lowered himself to the social status of the weak by refusing the patronage of the rich and becoming a manual laborer.
25. It's important not to lose the thread of Paul's argument and slip into thinking of spiritual discipline in an individualistic way. The self-control to which Paul is calling the "strong" is precisely the discipline of giving up their privileges for the sake of others in the community.
26. Paul resists the Corinthians' tendency to deprecate the body; the present passage is no exception. To "enslave" the body, according to Paul, means to devote it unreservedly to God's service through service to others (9:19), not to practice self-denial for its own sake.

REFLECTION

1. **What hazards might the "professional minister" face when serving a church that pays their salary?**
2. **All who are in Christ are called to share a sort of downward mobility. What does this mean to you and how does it impact the way you order your life?**
3. **What would it mean for us to embrace Paul's determination to do everything for the gospel's sake, to let that consideration shape all our vocational and economic choices?**
4. **Without denying that he could claim various rights, Paul exemplifies instead a freedom that relinquishes rights for the sake of others (v. 19). What might this look like in the modern world? Think of someone who, in modern times, relinquished their freedom and status for the freedom of others. What might this look like in your context?**
5. **Paul uses the metaphor of the soldier and the athlete to liken to the life of a Christ follower. Discuss his use of these metaphors and how they are applicable. How is your spiritual fitness?**

Resources

1. First Corinthians, Interpretation, Richard B. Hays
2. First Corinthians, New Covenant Commentary, B. J. Oropeza
3. First Letter to the Corinthians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Roy E. Ciampa and Brian Rosner
4. Feasting on the Word, David Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor Editors