

1st Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9 – John Karmelich

1. This lesson is about learning the difference between "Christian rights and Christian duties".
 - a) As a Christian, we are free to do "just about anything". Hopefully, one should know by now that just because we are free to do anything, does not mean we should do anything. As a saved Christian we are no longer "under the law". That does not give us a license to sin. While we are "free from the law", we are now "slaves to God", meaning we should want to live a life pleasing to God in all that we do.
 - b) In these two chapters we get into this issue, specifically in our relationship with other Christians. There are times as believers where we need to give up our rights so that other Christians don't stumble in their faith. For example, a mature believer may know that a certain type of food has no bearing on their relationship with Christ. But let's suppose we are in the presence of a less mature believer who doesn't think that way. They think, "Christians are not supposed to eat that stuff". The point is when we are around such people, we should give up our right to eat what we want in order that the less mature Christian will not stumble in their faith. In other words, it is our "Christian duty" to give up our rights in order to help out less mature believers.
 - c) This principal of "Christian rights and Christian duties" are an extension of Jesus' command to "love one another". The idea is we may have the right to do something, but out of our love for the fellow believer, it is our duty to give up that right in order to help out a believer so they don't sin.
 - d) Where does one draw the line on this issue? Let's say someone in our church feels it is wrong to have drums as part of worship music. Do we get rid of the drum set in order to make that person happy? The short answer is no. Will getting rid of that drum set make the offended person sin less? Probably not. That's the point! We need to give up our rights when it can cause a person to sin. We don't have to give up rights when it is a case where one Christian thinks something is appropriate and another does not.
 - e) If one travels around the world and studies different cultures within the Christian world, there are a lot of things our society would consider "unacceptable" Christian behavior and vice versa. There are some places where people get together to worship God and then go out for a drink. There are some Christian circles where cigarette smoking is acceptable and others where it is not. In the "gray areas" of Christianity (i.e., issues not clearly defined in the bible), Christians need to have a little grace, especially when it comes to cultural issues. If one is not comfortable being around someone who "does that sort of thing", one should hang out in a different church. If God wants that "other Christian" to change that habit, God is more than capable of working on them, and it is not our job to fix them!
 - i) The point of the last paragraph is to understand the difference between "Christian liberty" and "Christian requirements". If one of those "gray area things" causes somebody to want to sin, we should not do those things. If one of those "gray area things" makes another Christian say "It is wrong", but that offended Christian would never do such a thing, then, well, it is not a problem to do it! It may be offensive to another Christian, but it won't cause them to "stumble".
 - ii) The point of all of this is we are to give up our rights as Christians only when it can cause another person to sin! We don't have to give up our rights just because another Christian or Christian group thinks that issue is wrong.
 - iii) Note that I'm focusing on "gray areas". If there is some issue where the bible clearly says it is wrong, that is a different issue. If it is a cultural issue or some "gray area" issue, then the key issue is "does that action cause someone to sin?"

2. Believe it or not, that is the main topic of this lesson. The specific example used in Chapter 8 has to do "meat offered to idols". I'll explain what that meant historically in that chapter. Because that specific issue is not as common as it was 2,000 years ago, I wanted to state the bigger picture, which is about when a Christian should give up their legal rights. That is the idea behind the example in this chapter.
 - a) Chapter 9 continues that theme with different example. The issue is the rights of an apostle versus the rights of other believers. Paul argues that he has the right to ask the church pay his way and has the right to have a believing wife if he wants to.
 - b) Paul's point in Chapter 9 is he has given up some rights in order to win other people to Christ. That is what we are to learn. The "game plan" for Christians is for us to work to bring other people into the community and help Christians mature in their faith. Well in order to bring in new members, we often have to give up our rights as Christians as to not let less mature Christians "stumble" in their faith. A less mature believer may believe something is wrong and that "wrong thing" may cause them to sin if they see others doing it. God wants us to give up our rights to do "that thing" if it causes others to sin.
 - c) With all of that said, I better start on the text!
3. Chapter 8, Verse 1: Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But the man who loves God is known by God.
 - a) Remember that beginning in Chapter 7 Verse 1, Paul is answering questions brought to him by the Christians in Corinth. The question that starts here in Chapter 8 is what about food sacrificed to idols? Most of Chapter 8 is Paul answering that question.
 - b) Before Paul gets into the specific answer, Paul lays out the principal behind that answer!
 - c) It's probably good at this time to explain what "food sacrificed to idols" means:
 - i) The Greek and Roman culture that existed at that time believed in the existence of many gods. To make a long story short, when the Romans conquered Greece, there were thousands of Greek slaves taken to Italy and the Greek culture heavily influenced the Roman way of thinking. Eventually the Greek and Roman "gods" merged where there were Greek and Roman names for the same gods and it eventually became one religious system that dominated that world at that time.
 - ii) In this system, the average Greek or Roman did believe in evil spirits. They believed the way evil spirits entered our bodies was by the food we eat. In order to ward off evil spirits, meat was offered to the local gods. Part of the meat was burnt up as a sacrifice. Part of the meat belonged to the priests who worked in the various temples for work. The other part was then eaten by the giver of the sacrifice, who was now "safe" to eat the meat since it was given to the gods.
 - iii) The local priests had more meat than they could eat, so they would sell it or trade it so they could have other things. The point is the common people would eat and buy the meat from these temples. Therefore, anybody could get this meat.
 - d) This leads us back to the bible study: Paul's point that food offered to idols is "nothing" in that these gods don't really exist. Therefore, it is no big deal for Christians to eat such meat and they (we) have the right to eat such meat.
 - i) The problem is, let's say some Christians are invited to a non-Christian wedding and such meat is served. It's ok for Christians to eat such meat. Let's say at our table is some new believers who think it is wrong to eat meat offered to idols. If those young believers eat it, they think they are sinning and it encourages them to sin in other areas thinking it is acceptable.
 - ii) The point is we as Christians are to give up our right to eat that meat if it causes other Christians to sin or think they are sinning if they eat that meat!
 - e) This leads us to the rest of Verse 1: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up".
 - i) The concept of knowledge, all unto itself is not a bad thing.

- ii) We need to learn what is right and wrong in order to do the right thing.
 - iii) Paul's point here is "knowledge alone" without love applied to it is wrong.
 - iv) The idea of "puffing up" would be like a loaf of bread that puffs up when heated, but it is mostly air in the inside. The idea of "love builds" is that one is growing, but not just growing based on knowledge, but knowledge mixed with love!
 - v) Paul's point is that it is acceptable for Christians to eat such meat, but to eat it would not be a loving act if it causes other Christians to stumble.
- f) Verse 2 makes a similar point: "He knows something does not yet know as he ought to know".
- i) What Paul is saying that if a Christian knows it is no big deal to eat such meat, that Christian knows right from wrong, but it is a "puffed up" type of knowledge and not the loving type of knowledge God desires. The "loving" knowledge is to know that eating such meat may cause less mature Christians to stumble and therefore one ought to be careful to only eat such meat of others Christians who are less mature are not in their presence.
 - ii) In other words, "when in doubt, don't do it."
- g) Verse 3 then says, "But the man who loves God is known by God".
- i) That line by itself, is a classical Christian statement. It echo's what Jesus taught in the sense that if we know Jesus, then we do "know" God the Father (See John 17:25 on this issue). The point as it applies to the surrounding verses is that a sign we are doing God's will is how we act around fellow believers. It is through God's love that we have the ability to give up our "rights" to show love to others.
4. Verse 4: So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.
- a) In these three verses, Paul actually states that these "gods" are nothing. Legally, we shouldn't care whether or not a piece of meat is offered to idol as these idols have no power and therefore, it is the same as any other meat.
 - b) Paul then states there are many "gods and lords" in this world. The idea is that people worship all sorts of false gods. Just because people worship such gods do not make them any more real. Therefore we should not care if we eat the meat associated with such gods, unless it causes some other Christian to stumble.
 - c) Paul states the "basics" in that there is only one God, the Father and only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were made. Paul is denying the existence of other gods.
 - i) At such points, people tend to think about those who lived and never heard the gospel message: God judges them fairly based on what information they do have about God. In today's world, most adults around us have heard the gospel message. A majority of people give God "lip service", but never dedicate their lives to serving God nor live to make a difference for God! Those are the people God calls us to reach out to!
5. Verse 7: But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. ⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.
- a) In Verse 7 Paul says, "but not everyone knows this". Paul is talking about Christians. Paul's point is not all Christians understand that the other "gods" are meaningless. There are Christians who thought eating food sacrificed to an idol was a sin as they were somehow honoring another god. Paul's point is that since there are no other "real gods" it is not a sin to eat such meat as we are not offending anyone, let alone God".

- b) The point to the mature Christian is we should not eat such meat if it causes a weaker Christian to stumble in their faith.
 - i) One can apply that principal today to drinking alcohol or say, going to movies. It may be legal for Christians to do such things, but if causes other Christians around us to "stumble" if they see us doing such things, then we should give up our right.
 - c) So where does one draw the line on giving up our rights? The question is to ask the offended person "If I do this, would it cause you to sin, or do you just think it is wrong for me to do it? " If they just think it is wrong for you or me to do it, this is a separate issue. If it causes them to change their lifestyle for the worse, then it should be avoided. If such actions cause another Christian to think, "Well, if it's ok for them to (fill in the blank), then its ok for me to live however I want and ignore the principals taught in the bible". If that happens, then for that moment, one needs to give up the "pleasure of the moment" so the other Christian doesn't stumble.
6. Verse 9: Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.
- a) The main point is to be careful how we exercise our freedom in Christ. If our freedom causes other people to stumble, we have to be willing to give up our rights as Christians.
 - b) The main group of people Jesus argued with was the "Pharisee's". Their problem was that they had a whole list of do's and don'ts based on their interpretation of the Jewish law. To the Pharisee's it was a sin to violate one of their interpretations of the law.
 - i) The lesson to us is that on real "black and white" issues taught in the bible, there is to be no compromise. In such issues, we are to live as God commanded us.
 - ii) For "gray issues", we need to exercise a little restraint and say, "well, it may be ok or not ok for me to do this, but I shouldn't judge other Christians on this issue. It may be perfectly ok for them to live that way, but it's not for me. It doesn't mean we have to adjust our lifestyle to fit their lifestyle and vice versa. The issue is not how we live, but do the actions of our lives cause other Christians to "stumble" in their faith toward God.
 - iii) If we do something that causes other Christians to stumble, then we need to stop doing it, at the least in their presence. If it is a "gray issue" and it is a matter of one Christian saying, "We shouldn't be doing that", then one has to look to the bible for interpretation. There are many clear cut black and white issues in the bible and there are many gray issues. Maturity is about learning the difference.
 - c) This leads us back to the text: Paul is giving the specific example of food and I'm teaching the modern equivalent behind this principal! Verse 11: "So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge."
 - d) The "weak brother" is the one who thinks eating food offered to idols is sinful. If such a weak brother sees others eating such meat, they could think, "Well, those people are not really Christians if they are eating such meat!" The weaker Christian has their own sense of "do's and don'ts" and to violate them is a sin! If that weaker Christian thinks they are sinning, then we need to give up our rights in their presence. The point is to help the immature believer mature not by doing things that could offend them in their presence, but talking to them privately on the issue and if and when they change their mind, "then" we can eat idol food with them!
7. Verse 12: When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.
- a) Suppose we think, "Well, what's the big deal if they think it is wrong to eat such meat? I know it is no big deal therefore, it is ok if I eat such meat".

- b) Verse 12 is the answer to that question. The point is "we sin against Christ" when we refuse to alter our behavior in order to help out the weaker Christian. We may know that it is no big deal to eat such meat. The question is not of "right and wrong" but what can cause other Christians to sin!
 - i) Jesus cares about the life of the weaker Christian and Jesus does not want to see the weaker Christian stumble in his or her faith. Therefore, Jesus wants us to be good examples to other Christians and be willing to give up our rights as Christians so the weaker believer won't stumble in their faith!
 - c) Verse 13 is the key principal: "If eating such meat causes my brother (or sister) in Christ to fall into sin, then I won't eat meat any more".
 - i) What we don't want as Christians is to cause other Christians to sin. God wants us to work as a team to help each other mature in our faith. If some action that is "perfectly legal" for us causes others to sin, we need to give up that right. That's the underlying point of this 13-verse chapter!
 - ii) "Meat offered to idols" is the example. The principal is about living a life as a Christian that does not cause other Christians around us to stumble.
 - iii) Such a life is different for every Christian in every situation. What may be acceptable or unacceptable for you and I may be just the opposite for another Christian. The key is not our rights, the key is to ask ourselves, "Is how we are living causing other Christians around us to stumble in their faith of Jesus as Lord"? We need to make decisions based on that principal!
8. Chapter 9, Verse 1: Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? ² Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.
- a) Let's define what an "apostle" is again: It is someone "sent" by some one else. If my wife sends me to deliver a message on her behalf, I am an apostle for that message.
 - i) When we think of "the" apostles, we think of Jesus 12 apostles. If you study the gospels carefully, Jesus a larger group of followers than just the "12". Among that group, twelve were singled out for leadership.
 - ii) There is a classical Christian debate as to whether or not Paul replaced Judas as one of the "twelve". My purpose here is not to solve that debate. My purpose here is to state that Paul was a sent apostle of Jesus Christ. Whether he will be considered one of the "12" is something we'll have to find out one day in heaven!
 - iii) We have at least three recorded times where Jesus spoke directly to Paul. Those are recorded in Acts 9:4-5, 18:9-10; and Acts 22:17-18. There may be other times, but we do have scriptural evidence that Paul was a sent apostle from Jesus.
 - iv) Does that mean others could have been or be an "apostle"? Yes in the sense that God could speak to others about some specific mission. Paul is the only one, outside of the original "12" where we have scriptural evidence that he was called as an apostle.
 - b) With that said the text gives reasons why Paul was an apostle! Only one reason is based on Paul's personal contact with Jesus. The other reason is based on the success Paul had in starting the Christian church in Corinth.
 - i) It is Paul saying in effect, "You want evidence that I am an apostle? Well, look at the Christians all around you. I planted this church and personally led many of its members to Christ. The Christians in this town are the proof my apostleship!"
 - c) Paul also starts this section by saying "Am I not free?" What he meant by that is he has the same freedom in Christ as every other Christian in this town.
 - d) As to the reasons why Paul is giving this speech, we're coming to that in a few verses.

9. Verse 3: This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. ⁴ Don't we have the right to food and drink? ⁵ Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?
- a) If you recall from the early chapters of this letter, there was division among the Christians in Corinth. While some followed Paul, others were following Apollos and others Peter. Remember we're still reading the same letter, and the Christians in this town have not had a chance to deal with that issue, since it was brought up early in the letter.
 - b) Paul's point is he has the same rights and privileges as every other Christian and every other preacher of the Gospel message.
 - c) Remember that "Cephas" is the Aramaic name for "Peter". Apparently Peter had a believing wife that traveled with him. Jesus half-brothers who were saved also had wives. We know at the least, this included James and Jude, the writers of those epistles. Paul is saying that if he wanted to have a believing wife, he had that privilege too!
 - d) Verse 6 gets to the "crux" of the issue of the moment: "Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?"
 - i) Apparently other prominent Christians (presumably Peter and Jesus' half-brothers) were being supported by local churches as they went from location to location preaching the Gospel message!
 - ii) At the same time, many Christians in Corinth would not financially support Paul as he preached the Gospel. That is probably why Paul gave that little speech as to why he is really an apostle! Because Paul was not one of the original "12" apostles and did not travel with Jesus, maybe some doubted Paul's authority.
 - e) OK John, this is all interesting history. How does any of it apply to my life today?
 - i) I'm so glad you asked. ☺ The issue of the moment is financially supporting one's local minister! The Old Testament and the New Testament teach it is acceptable for a minister of the Gospel to make a living from that minister's supporters. (This is directly taught by Jesus in Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7.)
 - ii) Paul's point here is he had that right to take up a collection for himself, but he waved that right so he could offer the Gospel message free of charge!
10. Verse 7: Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk?
- a) Paul is still making the argument that those who preach the Gospel have a God-given right to ask their "flock" for payment to support their ministry. We'll get to the "why" question in a matter of verses, but some Christians in Corinth didn't believe Paul had that right as he was not one who was "around" during Jesus three years of teaching. Paul is still making his case here to support the local minister and His apostleship.
 - b) When someone enlists as a soldier, that soldier does not have to pay his own expenses. The local city (that era of time) or local country (our era) supports them with supplies and training. The point is a soldier, like a minister of the gospel is supported by others.
 - c) The second and third examples are both cases where one is a farmer and one is a shepherd. In both examples, those that work the farm and those that take care of the sheep get part of the proceeds for themselves. A farmer gets part of the farm for his own personal digestion. A sheep herder gets to drink the sheep's milk.
 - i) Paul's point is a farmer and a shepherd get to personally benefit from their work, just as a minister of the gospel gets to benefit from their work.
11. Verse 8: Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.

- a) Paul continues to make his case using an Old Testament Scripture. Paul is quoting Deuteronomy 25:4. Paul's point is this scripture about "muzzling an ox" was written primarily for human sakes. Oxen cannot read scripture. Yes God cares for animals and how we treat them. The point behind that scripture is that while oxen are being used to tread the grain, they should be fed. We shouldn't starve an animal while they are working for us!
 - b) The point behind the scripture is more than just feeding the animals. The point is those that are working directly for God should be financially supported by other Christians.
 - c) In the Old Testament, all Israelites tithed (gave 10%) of their income to the "Levites". The Levites were one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The Levites were not given sections of the Promised Land like the other tribes as the Levites were separated by God to be his servants between God and the other tribes. Even the Levites had to give 10% of their tithing to the priests, who were a subset of their tribe.
 - d) Are Christians required to tithe? Some churches argue yes and some no. I argue "no" and here is my reason: Christians are not under the "law" like the Jews and therefore, that specific requirement is not for us. At the same time, Paul is going to encourage us to give and do it with a happy heart! The point is Christians should give and do so happily. Not out of obligation, but because we want to please God in all that we do!
 - i) This does lead us back to these verses. The point is Christians should give money to support those that preach the Gospel and should give to support our ministers.
12. Verse 11: If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ¹² If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?
- a) Verse 12 has a key point: If "others have this right of support", don't we (Paul and Barnabas) also? Apparently the Christians in Corinth did understand this principal, but did not feel it is necessary to support Paul. They supported other Gospel preachers and maybe even their own leaders, but not Paul. Why didn't they financial support Paul? Maybe they felt it wasn't their duty or maybe it had to do with church division.
13. Verse 12 (cont.): But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.
- a) Paul understood that he was called to preach the Gospel whether he liked it or not. Paul understood he had to preach the Gospel whether the local people supported him or not.
 - b) This sentence leads us back to the lesson theme: Christians have rights, but we need to give up those rights out of the love for others. Paul's main point is he had the right to ask for money, but he gave up that right in order to not hinder preaching the Gospel message.
 - i) Remember the theme of these two chapters have to do with our rights as Christians versus our duties as Christians. Our duty is to give up our rights if those rights could cause other Christians to stumble in their faith!
 - ii) If a non-Christian or a new Christian saw the local church giving Paul money, some would think Paul is preaching for the money and not out of a sense of obligation to preach the truth of Jesus Christ to people!
14. Verse 13: Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.
- a) Paul is now back to preaching the fact that those who "work" preaching the gospel have the right to earn a living by doing so.
 - b) Paul's example is the Old Testament priests who work at the temple. ("The temple" in Jerusalem still stood when Paul wrote this!) The Old Testament priests make their living by sharing in the offerings people give to them. In a similar way, Jesus commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel!
 - i) This gets back to my reference to Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7. Jesus made the point that those who preach the gospel can financially live off that benefit!

15. Verse 15: But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast.
- a) Here we get to a key point of this chapter: Paul is not making this speech so that the Christians in Corinth would take up a collection for him. Paul is simply teaching that it is the duty of Christians to support their spiritual leaders. It is not a salvation requirement to support our local ministers, but one should do so to show our love to God.
 - b) When Paul first came to Corinth, the book of Acts teaches that Paul supported himself by being a tentmaker. (See Acts 18:3). Paul is "boasting" in the fact that he was preaching the Gospel message free of charge. He did not do this as an obligation, but as to show his love for the local Christians by not charging them for his preaching work.
16. Verse 16: Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!
- a) If I had to pick the most important verse in this lesson, it is this one right here!
 - b) The key phrase is Paul said, "I (he) was compelled to preach".
 - c) Remember why Paul preached the Gospel? It is because Jesus stopped him from arresting Christians and told him to go preach that Jesus is the Christ. That's the main points behind the "Damascus Road" experience of Acts Chapter 9!
 - i) When Jesus encountered Paul on the Damascus Road, the point was not to just teach Paul to stop persecuting Christians, the point is Paul was called by Jesus personally to go preach the Gospel message.
 - ii) Paul was "compelled" to preach the Gospel message.
 - d) When somebody is called by God to do something, there are always going to be times when that person gets discouraged and wants to quit. It is usually a deep down desire to accomplish some God-given goal that gets that person to keep moving. In this case, Paul was called to keep preaching the Gospel message, no matter what else.
 - i) I'm reminded of a story I heard by Alistair Begg (who has a large radio ministry) one time at a conference: He said, "It's usually around 9pm on a Sunday evening that I say out loud, "That did it, I quit the ministry. I can't take it anymore. Then I wake up the next morning and say, OK, I'll give it one more week." The point of that story is Alistair knows he was called to preach the Gospel and despite the fact it is normal to get discouraged at times, he moves on!
 - ii) This ties to Paul's statement of "Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel".
 - e) I believe Paul had the attitude of "If I had a choice in the matter, I would do something else! I (Paul) don't enjoy being whipped, put in jail and stoned for doing what God called me to do! I don't do this because I want to do it, I do it because I was called to!"
 - i) So how do you and I know if we are called by God to do something? First of all, God would never ask us to do anything unbiblical. If a voice inside of you is telling you to steal something, it is not the voice of God. If we have some "desire" to do some work for God, it is usually God putting that desire in us!
 - ii) We don't have to wait for the voice of God to get started. If we have this sense that God is calling us to some special ministry and 1) It is nothing anti-biblical and 2) Our wife and kids are willing to put up with it and not give up all our time for them, then it is God calling us to do that act. For some, that means changing profession and going into the "professional" ministry. For others, it may be a call to get involved in some ministerial project for God.
 - f) Getting back to Paul, he finishes with, "Woe to me if I don't preach the Gospel".
 - i) This ties to the concept that Paul is in "eternal trouble" if he does not do what God called him to do. It has nothing to do with Paul's salvation, but has to do with Paul's eternal reward in heaven. Paul understood that.
 - ii) God gives us desires to do things for Him. If we ignore those desires, well then "woe to us". We are still saved, but we're ignoring God's call for our lives.

17. Verse 17: If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.
- a) Verses 17-18 expands on the principals taught in Verse 16. In other words, "I jumped the gun" trying to describe what Paul is trying to teach us. ☺
 - b) In Verse 17, Paul says that if he preaches voluntarily, he has a reward. If Paul fails to preach, he would become discharged from the trust given to him by God.
 - i) In other words, Paul's salvation is not at stake whether or not Paul preaches the Gospel message. What is at stake, is Paul's reward in heaven based on his loyalty to what God has called him to do.
 - c) Hopefully by now, you see the point I am preaching to you and me! God calls each of us to serve Him in different capacities! Whether or not we fulfill that calling has nothing to do with our salvation. The issue of being saved is about accepting Jesus payment for our sins and realizing Jesus is Lord of our lives (besides a few of the other essentials).
 - i) At the same time, we can earn "eternal rewards" based on service to God. If we fulfill what God has called us to do, there are eternal rewards for that service.
 - ii) I don't know what those eternal rewards are, but I am willing to bet my soul they are far greater than any suffering in this lifetime in order to accomplish what God has called us to do! In other words, it is worth putting up with whatever Satan throws our way in order to accomplish what God wants to us to do!
 - d) In Verse 18, Paul gets back to the "free of charge" issue and the fact that Paul has every right to get paid for his work. Paul had the right to demand the Christians in Corinth pay his way for his ministerial work. At the same time, Paul forfeited that right as it might prevent people from becoming Christians. Paul didn't want anyone to question his motives as a preacher and think Paul was doing it for the money!
 - i) During church serves, when the plate is being past around, many pastors will announce from the pulpit, "If you are a guest here today, please do not put any offerings in the plate. Do not feel any obligation to contribute."
 - ii) There was one church I used to attend where the pastor would not even pass the plate! They just had a collection box to drop off offerings as one entered the room!
 - iii) The point is being paid to preach the Gospel is a right, but we have to be willing to give up that right in order to not offend people who are questioning our motives!
18. Verse 19: Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.
- a) Paul is continuing his argument that he gave up his rights as a preacher of the Gospel in order to win others to Christ. Paul then gives three examples: 1) To the Jews, I became like a Jew to win Jews to Christ. 2) To those not having the law (i.e., non-Jews) I became like them so as to win them (us) to God. 3) The final category is those who are weak, I became weak to win them to God.
 - b) First, let's talk about Paul and "The Jews". Paul was Jewish by birth. Paul understood that God made unconditional promises to the Jewish Nation. As far as salvation is concerned, that is an individual issue based on one's belief that Jesus died for our sins. Being Jewish does not get one any special favors on that issue.
 - i) However, being Jewish had other benefits. A Jew is aware of God's laws for one's life. There are promises made to the Jewish nation that Gentile nations don't get.
 - ii) So how did Paul, "Become like one under the law?" I believe that meant when Paul was with Jews, he did his best to follow the law and Jewish customs.

- iii) Paul did not believe that obeying the law added to his salvation. He did believe that living a life pleasing to God is what He should do, but that is different from the act of being judged for salvation based on how one lived their lives!
 - iv) With that said, I believe when Paul was around Jewish people who were not Christians, Paul did his best not to offend them. He lived like a religious Jew in every capacity other than denying Jesus as Lord. I believe Paul still kept the Jewish holidays and did "Jewish things". The recorded example is in Acts where Paul sponsored some Jewish-Christians to perform a Jewish "purification" ritual as described in Acts 21:17-29. The point is Paul stayed as "Jewish as possible" when around Jews in order to win as many as possible to Christ.
 - c) Next, let's talk about Paul and non-Jews (i.e., Gentiles).
 - i) I believe that when Paul was in a setting with Gentiles, Paul would eat with them and ate "non-kosher" food. Paul lived like the people he was trying to win over in order to win some for Christ.
 - ii) The only evidence we have of a "mixed setting" of Jews and Gentiles is in Galatians Chapter 2, Verse 11, where Paul put down Peter for eating only with Jews and ignoring Gentile-converts. I don't think Paul cares if he offended people who thought some issue was biblically right or wrong. Paul only cared in situations where it caused people to stumble in their faith in God. In that Galatians incident, Peter was wrong as he would not eat with Gentile Christians. Peter was wrongly thinking in effect, "You Gentile Christians are not pleasing to God by eating the way you eat." That act was wrong.
 - d) In the final line of this paragraph, Paul says, "To the weak, I became weak".
 - i) I don't think Paul was signaling out either Jews or Gentiles with that remark. The idea of "weak" is someone who is physically weak. Maybe such people didn't have much to eat or they were handicapped from working in some way.
 - ii) The point is such people were "low" on life's totem pole for some reason. It can refer to the lowest of slaves. It can refer to those who were cast out of society for some reason. It can refer to someone with a physical handicap. The point is in such cases Paul "lowered himself" voluntarily to their level to help them.
 - iii) Remember that the Gospel message includes the idea of "Freedom comes from within". Should we help the weak get stronger, of course! Sometimes in order to win people, first we have to lower ourselves to their level to show that we care!
19. Verse 21: I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.
- a) Paul understood that not everyone would accept the Gospel message. At the same time, Paul understood that some people would get it. Some of those people came from Jewish backgrounds, some from Gentile backgrounds and some who were weak in life would also get the message.
 - b) Paul understood the best way to communicate that message is to get "close to such people" and to the best of Paul's ability live like them for awhile!
 - i) Does that mean that Paul "faked it" when around people! I believe Paul made every effort to show he cared for the people he was trying to win over. People know when you are faking it! The issue is whether or not we are making an effort to care for others and care about their lives. I believe that is what Paul did as a minister of the Gospel!
 - ii) The greatest ministry efforts is rarely from the pulpit itself. When one preaches the Gospel message from the pulpit, we often see the "results" of one's hearts getting convicted. What we don't usually see is the "one on one" work that lead to the moment where people give their hearts to God.
 - iii) I'm convinced Paul did a lot of "one on one" work to be a minister of the Gospel.

- iv) That means, that Paul made every effort to live like the people he was trying to witness to. It wasn't a matter of trying to flatter Jews or Gentiles by living like them, it is about showing people you really care about them. One way of showing them is to adapt their lifestyle for a while to show that you understand what they are going through in life! I believe that is what Paul did!
 - c) Paul finishes with "That I may share in its blessings".
 - i) A reward of preaching the gospel is one often gets to see (but not guaranteed) people saved and change their lives for the better. I believe Paul enjoyed that aspect of the ministry. Paul put up with all the hardships and was rewarded by seeing people get saved and change their lives for the better.
 - ii) That is how Paul got to share in the blessings of the Gospel!
20. Verse 24: Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.
- a) If one lived in Corinth at that time, one would be very familiar with Olympic games. Long before the Romans conquered the Greeks, the Greeks had a tradition of annual contests involving various athletic activities. In fact, the history of Greece is one of constant fighting among the different city-states. Such groups would agree to truce's during the times of these athletic contests.
 - i) Most people are familiar with the games in Athens, Greece. Those games were held ever four years. Well, there was another set of games held in Corinth on a different set of four years. A few other cities had major events as well.
 - ii) Even when the Romans took over, they kept a lot of the Greek style games including the festival in Corinth. The point is Paul's audience could relate to Paul's illustration of Olympic style athletic contents.
 - b) For an athletic contest, an athlete has to train him or her self. They have to be disciplined in order to be a better athlete. Such training may not be necessary to enter the contest, but the athlete will not win unless they train.
 - i) Along the same lines, disciples of Christ must train themselves and be prepared for what God has called them to do. It does not mean one has to go to Seminary in order to preach the Gospel. Some types of missionary work require special training and Bible College can prepare one for such work. Other God-inspired callings us require us to just get moving and let God guide us.
 - ii) No matter how much training one entails, one is never "fully ready". God constantly guides us as we do ministerial work. My point here is that pre-training is a good thing but don't wait to be "fully trained" or one will never begin!
 - c) Back to the text, Paul says he "makes his body his slave" for the Gospel sake.
 - i) What that essentially means is that Paul understands that he is not to give in to human needs at the expense of the Gospel.
 - ii) For example, Paul may have to give up eating a certain type of food for awhile if the person he is witnessing to is offended by that type of food. Paul may have every right to eat that food, but like an athlete in training, it is a matter of giving up one's rights in order to be a good witness for Christ.
 - iii) One can apply this illustration to just about any aspect of our lives. We may have to give up a good night sleep in order to be a living witness in some situation.
 - iv) We may have to pass on going out drinking with some "old friends" as that would be a bad witness. We as Christians have the freedom to do anything we want, but not everything is beneficial to us as a witness to God and those around us.

- d) The one place where Paul's example in these verses is a little bit off is as follows:
- i) In the Greek athletic events, there is only one winner. That winner gets a crown, which signifies they won the event.
 - ii) In Christianity, everyone who gives his or her life to Jesus is already a winner. We can't earn our salvation any more than what Jesus has already done.
 - iii) A purpose of our efforts to do what God calls us to do is for our "heavenly rewards". God calls us into individual and group ministries, and we have rewards in heaven based on our faithfulness to fulfill that ministry. We can lose our eternal rewards if we fail to do what God has called us to do, but we can't lose our salvation.
 - a) I specifically wrote "a" purpose and not "the" purpose" for serving God! Even if we don't care about such rewards, what we should care about is pleasing God in all that we do. If we care about pleasing God, then we should do what He asks us to do.
 - b) A big part of Christian service is the willingness to give up our rights in order to be a good witness to others.
 - iv) What if I don't know what God called me to do? Ask Him! If one still does not have a clear answer, try different projects at one's church or in one's community. Usually the correct answer involves something one enjoys and is good at. I should add there is never an end to needs that are out there. Sometimes we need to help our family and friends when such needs arise. My point here is just because there is some church need, it does not necessary mean that is what God is calling you or me to do. In other words, one has to balance other commitments with one's ministry commitments.
 - a) As a personal example, my calling to this writing ministry means saying no to other ministerial projects. Sometimes I say yes as some volunteers are needed for some short term project. Sometimes I turn down such offers as I need to make time for my wife and kids or work projects.
 - b) My point here is that God does not require us to do it all, but He does ask us to get involved.
 - c) Back to the question of what ministry is right for you? I usually find God guides us and prepares us for what He wants of us. If one does not have a clear answer, try different things that interest you and well then watch God work in our lives for His glory!

21. The summary point of the past set of verses is also the summary point of this lesson: The idea is that we as Christians are free to do anything that is not strictly forbidden. That will be my closing prayer for this lesson. Father, help us to put aside our ego and our rights, for Your name sake and Your glory. Help us to let go of the things we are legally entitled to do, but if we do them, we could be a bad witness to those around us. At the same time, help us to discern how to be a good witness to others in terms of what to do and what not to do. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

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