



AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
CLASS – Lesson 14

GENERAL OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 7:1-11:16, Questions asked about marriage, idols & head coverings

OUTLINE: Lesson 14

1 Corinthians 9:1-27, Self-denial (for the benefit of others)

- 9:1-14 Introductory arguments
- 9:15-18 Paul's example
- 9:19-23 The principle explained and applied
- 9:24-27 Personal self-discipline

In the preceding chapter, Paul called his readers to forego the exercise of certain freedoms if so needed to avoid causing a brother to stumble. All of the major problems in the Corinthian church were related to relationships between Christians, and particularly to their failure to submit self-interest to the well-being of other members of the spiritual body. Paul realizes how difficult and how counter-cultural it is to overcome self-centeredness for the good of others. So, in chapter 9, he opens a lengthy section that presses the importance of humility and sacrifice.

Chapter 8 and 10 address directly questions related to the eating of foods offered to idols or served in pagan temples. Even though chapter 9 is focused more on how we exercise our rights, the discussion is still set in the general context of foods, idolatry and the danger of causing our brothers to stumble.

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 9:1-14, Introductory arguments

Paul ended chapter 8 with the personal claim that, if needed, he would change his diet to avoid causing a brother in Christ to violate his conscience. The early verses of chapter 9 explain the force of this claim. As an apostle, Paul had all kinds of "rights," and the Corinthians knew from their association with Paul that he had systematically relinquished those rights. So in his call for them to serve one another, he was preaching what he had a history of practicing.

There is also debate over the degree to which Paul is defending his authority as an apostle against some people (possibly visitors to Corinth) who claimed that he was not a full-fledged apostle like Peter (Cephas) and others. Some of his critics may have claimed that he didn't accept pay for his ministry since he wasn't a true apostle. In our study, we will look at how prominent this theory is, and how it might be balanced with other factors. Whatever their criticism, Paul asserts his rights and explains the real reason he didn't use them.

- 1. What credentials did Paul possess that could arguably give him certain rights?**

- 2. In what way was Paul “free” (v. 1) that would have relevance in this discussion (cf. v. 19)?**

- 3. What rights does Paul claim as rights that he possessed, but didn’t use?**

- 4. Is Paul criticizing other apostles for exercising some privileges that he refrained from using, or suggesting that those who used such benefits were less spiritual than he? In other words, is his purpose here to set a standard for apostles and evangelists, or something else? If something else, what?**

- 5. From various passages in Acts and Paul’s letters, what do we know of Paul’s sources of financial income or support? Cp. Acts 16:15; 18:3; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9; 1 Corinthians 4:12; Philippians 4:14-18.**

- 6. What common sense examples does Paul cite to illustrate his right to be paid for his work?**

- 7. Paul refers to oxen used in threshing grain and points out that the Law of Moses required the farmer to allow the animals to eat some of the grain, but then claims that the oxen are a metaphor for any laborer. Check the quotation from Deuteronomy 25:4. How can this command about animals be used to support Paul’s argument (cf. Matthew 6:26)?**

- 8. It seems clear that at some point (either when he wrote 1 Corinthians, or at least by the time he wrote 2 Corinthians) some people were contesting Paul's claim to be a real apostle. Is that his reason in this chapter for affirming his rights, or is there something else more important at this point? If so, what?**

- 9. If, as Paul says, Jesus commanded that "those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel," was Paul disobedient to a command of the Lord by refusing support from the Corinthians? Where is this command recorded?**

1 Corinthians 9:15-18, Paul's example

Having firmly established the fact that as an apostle, or one working for the gospel, Paul could reasonably claim to possess certain rights. He now shows that he had not exercised those rights. His purpose is to give weight to his call to the Corinthians to willingly give up things that they might have claimed were rightfully theirs.

In short, everything said in verses 1-14 was laying a foundation for what he says in verses 15-18. He now states what he presents as an example for the Corinthians to follow if they were properly concerned for each other's spiritual health.

- 10. Four times Paul introduces a statement with the word "for," indicating his reason for doing certain things. What are those four reasons?**

- 11. What was Paul compelled to do?**

- 12. What did Paul do willingly?**

- 13. In what way was Paul rewarded for declining the financial support of the Corinthians.**

14. What was the abuse of authority that Paul feared, and what did he do to prevent that “abuse”?

1 Corinthians 9:19-23, The principle explained and applied

Paul has claimed his rights and has explained that for the good of the gospel he has not exercised those rights. He now explains how this voluntary decision has left him free – not free to make a self-centered use of his rights, but rather free to lay his rights aside in voluntary service to all.

15. If Paul had accepted support from the Corinthians, how might that have complicated his ministry to that congregation? Remember that there were rival factions in the congregation. How did being free from obligations to any group (especially financial obligations) allow him to better serve all of them?

16. Since Jewish law originally came from God, to follow Jewish customs when in the presence of Jews would not normally have led Paul to engage in any ungodly practices. That would not be the case when “connecting” with Gentile audiences. What does Paul say that shows that there were limits to how far he could go in “relating” to any group? In other words, how could Paul become as the weak if the weak are doing sinful things (as the weak tend to do)?

17. Other than the fact that he wasn’t bound to follow any group’s customs (“free from all”), what was the clear and sole goal of Paul’s adaptability?

1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Personal self-discipline

In this paragraph, Paul seems to shift to a new topic, but that is not really the case. He is merely presenting a different mixed metaphor (running and boxing) to promote the same idea from a different angle.

Paul’s athletic analogy contains some details that should not be pressed too far because they function to fill out the illustration, but are not a part of the actual message. E.g., all Christians can be saved. Salvation is not a competition where only one wins the prize.

18. What feature does Paul highlight that is common to both runners and boxers and contributes to their receiving the prize? How does this idea fit into this concluding statement that presents the overall message of chapter 9? What is the prize that should guide everything we do?