

Chapter Nine

THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM

(9:1-27)

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why did Paul have to write to the Corinthians about his rights?
2. How did he defend his rights?—on what basis?
3. If Paul was so defensive about his rights, why did he not use them?
4. Did Paul compromise Christian convictions to become all things to all men?
5. What does self-control have to do with freedom?

SECTION 1

Recitation of Rights (9:1-14)

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus **9**our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? **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.

3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. **4**Do we not have the right to our food and drink? **5**Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? **6**Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? **7**Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

8 Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law say the same? **9**For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? **10**Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of a share in the crop. **11**If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? **12**If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more?

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Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. ¹³Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? ¹⁴In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

9:1-7 The Logic: What is freedom? Is a Christian really free? The answer to those questions depends on the meaning of the word *freedom*! Freedom is a state of *character*, not circumstances. Freedom belongs to persons and has a personal objective. Freedom is not an objective in itself. Man is not *just* free—he is free *for* some purpose. Freedom should have as its objective the production of the highest form of personality possible. Freedom should have as its purpose the production of character—good character. The “freedom” (or license) that allows self-indulgence and anarchy produces bad character because man’s potential has a higher goal than self-indulgence. Freedom (the opposite of bondage and enslavement) by its very nature should exist for the purpose of removing all hindrances and restraints that would keep a person from reaching the highest potential for good of which he is capable.

This is precisely what Christian freedom is all about. God, through Christ, has set the Christian free from all hindrances and restraints that would keep him from reaching the highest possibility for which he was redeemed. God, through Christ, makes everything and everyone available for the Christian’s development (I Cor. 3:21-23). It is not our surroundings or our circumstances that keep us from our highest God-ordained possibilities. Attitudes are what enslave us and hinder us. The attitudes which hinder are: (a) guilt; (b) insecurity; (c) rebellion against our Creator and his creation; (d) rejecting the truth about what is real and enduring; (e) fear of death; (f) selfishness. If these may be conquered we will be free and reaching God’s potential for us no matter what our circumstances (even persecution and prison). The real issue is not physical liberation but spiritual liberation. Any man, anywhere, whether politically, socially or literally imprisoned or not, may be *spiritually free* if he trusts God’s Word concerning man’s true purpose and possibility.

In other words, our true freedom depends on whether we believe God’s word about what he made us for and how he says we may

attain it. God made us to produce in us and for us character of the highest goodness. He made us to be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). Truth makes man free (John 8:31-32). All truth, God's truth, wherever it is, in the Bible, in creation, in other men, we are to find it, believe it and act according to it. ". . . Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom . . . And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another . . ." (II Cor. 3:17-18). The apostle Paul was a man free in Christ, reaching for the highest good Christ intended him to have. He explains how he *used* his freedom to reach that goal. He has said, in chapter eight, that he was not asking the Christians at Corinth to do anything that he was not doing.

Paul claimed every right allowed him by God's word. He refused to let any man, by making human rules where God never made any, take away any right by which he might reach the goal Christ intended in him. One part of Christ's goal for Paul was his world-wide apostleship. In a series of rhetorical questions, Paul sets forth the logic of his freedom and its use. His first assertion of the logic of his rights is in his question, "Am I not an apostle?" He not only had the rights of a Christian but also the special rights of one particularly commissioned by the Lord to take the gospel to the whole world (an apostle). He is not thinking here of his *authority* as an apostle, but of his right to financial *support* as one "sent" (an apostle). His second appeal to logic is in his question, "Are you not my workmanship in the Lord?" He claimed the right to support on the basis of their obligation to him as the one who brought them to Christ (see Rom. 15:26-27; Gal. 6:6). The Greek word *sphragis* is translated *seal* and means, "to authenticate, to validate." Their conversion to Christ certainly confirmed Paul's apostleship and his right to expect them to support him.

The Greek participle *anakrinousin* is present indicative, *not* subjunctive, and indicates some of the Christians were *examining* or *making judgments* about his right, not only to expect financial support for himself as he preached the gospel, but also the right to expect support for a family. Paul apparently received financial support from the church at Antioch when he was first "sent out" by that church (Acts 13:1-3); he received some support from the church at Philippi (Phil. 4:14-18). But from the beginning of his second missionary journey he chose to support himself by working at his trade as a

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tentmaker (Acts 15:40; 18:1-4; II Cor. 11:7; I Thess. 2:9; 4:11; II Thess. 3:8).

While the apostle used the Greek word *eleutheros*, translated *free*, in verse 1, he used the word *exousian*, translated *right*, in verses 4, 5, and 6, (see comments, 8:9 on word *liberty*). Paul lists Barnabas as one also set aside by the Lord and the church for a full-time ministry and as such, one who has the right to expect Christians to support him, and a family. Since Barnabas (see Acts 4:36; 9:26-27; 11:22-30; 13:2; 15:39) was not an apostle in the same sense as Paul, this is evidently a statement of the rights of all full-time Christian evangelists to be supported financially by other Christians. Paul's statement of the rights of an apostle, and an evangelist, to have a wife deals a death-blow to the Roman Catholic "canon-law" that popes and priests must *not* have wives. Paul substantiates the Gospel records that the apostle Peter was married and his wife journeyed with him in his evangelistic work. Our text clearly states that the "brothers of the Lord" (James, Joseph, Simon and Judas, Matt. 13:55) also had wives who accompanied them in their work. Mary, mother of Jesus was not a "perpetual virgin."

Paul's third appeal to logic is in verse 7. He uses three analogies from the common life of that time to prove his point. In II Timothy 2:1-7 Paul has similar analogies to encourage Timothy to train a company of faithful, full-time evangelists, like himself, who will be devoting all their time to teaching others. They must not get "entangled in civilian pursuits." Now, in this letter to the Corinthians, he declares that a "soldier" of Christ who has not entangled himself in civilian pursuits but has given full-time to the ministry of the Word has the right to expect to be supported financially by the "army" of the Lord, the church. Not only so, but the "soldier's" wife and family also.

9:8-12a The Law: Paul anticipates that some of the Corinthians might object that his first defense of his rights is based on human thinking. So, he asks a rhetorical question, "It is true, is it not, that as a human I am speaking these things?" He expects them to answer, "Yes!" In so doing, he is able to give impact to his introduction of the Law of Moses—the word of God—into the defense of his rights. He follows with a second rhetorical question, "The Law of Moses, does it not say the same thing?" The expected answer is, "Yes!" But Paul immediately supplies the answer, "For it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox when it is

treating out the grain.” Paul’s quotation comes from Deuteronomy 25:4. The Israelites threshed grain by having oxen pull a stone or a “threshing sledge” with iron wheels over the grain to separate the grain from the husks. The ox was permitted to eat of the grain as he threshed. This was demanded by God in his Law to keep men from being cruel to animals. God cares about the animals in his creation. It is God’s will that animals be cared for by those whom they serve. This regulation in Deuteronomy is contained in a series of laws about economic and social justice. But it is not for oxen *only* that God is concerned. Paul does not mean to say that God is not concerned for oxen—he has already established that. Surely, if God legislates that oxen serving men are to be fed by men, then men serving others in spiritual things are to be fed by those they serve. Paul applies the same Old Testament law to the support of elders who labor in preaching and teaching the Word (I Tim. 5:17-18).

The word *entirely*, in verse 10, is too strong for the context. Paul does not mean the law of Deuteronomy 25:4 was totally for man and not for oxen at all. The Greek word *pantos* might be translated here, “by all means, doubtless, at least.” The teaching of Jesus (Matt. 6:25-34) explains that while God cares for birds and lilies, he will “much more” care for men who love him. Paul answers his own rhetorical question of verse 10 by stating, “It *was* written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope . . . of a share in the crop.” The Greek word *opheilei* is translated *should*, but carries the idea of obligation or *duty*; it is sometimes translated *ought*, *owe*, or *bound*. The “plowman” is duty bound to “plow” in hope of sharing in the product of his labor.

The plowman’s right becomes an analogy by which Paul asserts the right of a spiritual “sower” to be supported in *material* (Gr. *sarkika*, fleshly, physical) sustenance from the hands of those who have benefited from the spiritual sowing.

Almost indignantly (9:12a) Paul asks, “If you authorize others the right of sharing your material goods, shouldn’t you acknowledge that we (Christian evangelists) have even greater right?” Who are the “others”? Some think they are the other apostles and other evangelists who had already been given the privilege of support by the churches (9:3-6). Some think “others” refers to the Judaizers (II Cor. chapters 3 and 4) who had taught them. In addition “others” may refer to teachers of Greek philosophy and letters. It was common practice for the peripatetic (walking-around) teachers of Greek

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culture and philosophy to be supported financially by the parents of their students. Whatever the case in Corinth, it is a fact of the modern world that while men and women willingly band together in cities or rural districts and pay taxes for gymnasiums, football stadiums, huge public school buildings, buses, teachers' and administrators' salaries for the secular education of their societies, some Christians often begrudge a minister of the gospel and his family a salary commensurate with the average of the membership of the church. Preachers and evangelists who are in the ministry primarily for the money are hirelings (John 10:7-18)! But that is not what Paul is discussing here. His phrase, ". . . do not we still more?" signifies the right of a faithful evangelist or preacher of the gospel to expect "even more" (or, "rather first") consideration in material support than Christians give in other areas of life.

9:12b-14 The Lord: If Paul found it necessary to be financially supported, or to marry, to reach the goal God had for his life, then he declared himself free to do so. Not only was he free to do so, he insisted the brethren acknowledge his rights. If Paul had *not* insisted that others at least acknowledge his freedom or his rights, he would have allowed the truth to be perverted and, to that extent, have forfeited his freedom by compromising with falsehood.

Now Paul might surrender his *use* of these freedoms or rights of his own to take an even better action in order to produce the highest good. But he must not surrender his *right* to such freedom for that would be surrender to spiritual slavery. Our freedom in Christ must always be defended (Gal. 5:1ff.) whether we exercise every aspect of it or not.

The very essence of freedom is choice. Freedom in its ultimate and highest sense can never be legislated or enforced. Christian freedom *is* the ultimate freedom. Christ fulfilled the law written in ordinances. Those who choose Christ are no longer limited by the law. Their goal of spiritual growth is not fettered by or limited by law. They may choose the highest spiritual goal of all—being conformed to the image of God's Son—perfection. Paul always tried to choose what he thought, guided by God's revelation, was the highest spirituality in his own life and in the life of others.

So, here, he exercises his right to surrender what he considers a lesser right (to be financially supported by the Corinthian church) in favor of a more spiritually productive right (not to put any obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ). This was Paul's free choice for

Corinth. But apparently it was not always his choice. In a different circumstance, and with a different body of believers, he chose to accept their financial support (see Phil. 4:15-18), for their spiritual growth.

It appears the Corinthian church later accused Paul of being a false apostle because he did not take financial support (see II Cor. 12:13, 16, 17) from them. While Paul could not know ahead of time how the Corinthians would react to forfeiting his right to financial support, it must have grieved him to later be despised for an act of love he intended for their spiritual advancement. But that goes with the territory of exercising Christian freedom!

In the first covenant (the Old Testament) the Lord commanded that the priests who devoted all their life to serving in the Temple were to be sustained by sharing (Gr. *summerizontai*, a dividing-up, an apportioning) of all the offerings given by their Hebrew brethren to the Lord. Reviving this ordinance of the Lord was one of the first and most significant acts of Hezekiah in his attempt to bring repentance to the nation (see II Chron. 31:4-19).

The Lord Jesus Christ ordained the same practice for the New Testament church. The Greek word *dietaxe*, *ordained* or *commanded*, was used in other Greek literature to describe official *appointments* to position of authority. The Lord did not approach the matter of support for full-time Christian servants as a suggestion but as an official edict. He commanded it. The church has no choice in the matter. The individual servant of the Lord may choose to forego this right, but the church is ordered by the Lord himself to support the faithful evangelists it sets aside to full-time service in the Gospel. The laborer is worthy of his hire (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7; I Tim. 5:17-18).

A few commentators have used the KJV translation, “. . . they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” to say the Lord meant “those who preach the gospel should live according to what they preach.” The *context* makes it clear this is not the meaning. The RSV translation gives the correct meaning, “. . . those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.” The Greek words are even clearer; “. . . *ek tou euangeliou zen*.” The Greek preposition *ek* means “out of,” or “from”; the Greek infinitive *zen* means “to live.” Those who proclaim the gospel are to live out of the gospel.

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SECTION 2

Relinquishment of Rights (9:15-18)

15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have any one deprive me of my ground for boasting. 16For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. 18What then is my reward? Just this: that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel.

9:15-16 Sacrifice: In this section the apostle begins to make a transition from the specific right of financial support he claimed, to the principle of the need for relinquishment of any right in certain circumstances. He has called upon the Corinthians to consider the *principle* (8:1-13) earlier. He illustrates the *application* of the principle in his own actions (9:1-14). He will state the purpose of the principle (9:19-27) later, but here he is proving that he has not asked the Corinthians to make a more severe sacrifice of rights than he himself had been willing to make. He uses the Greek word *kechremai*, a perfect tense verb, which indicates an action begun in the past and continuing at the present. Paul had never exercised his right to be financially supported upon the Corinthian church.

Furthermore, he denies that he has used the illustration of his own practice as some sort of subtle attempt to elicit financial support from them now. He says, “. . . nor am I writing these things in order that so it should become with me” (literal translation of the Greek). His motive in using himself as an example is pure. He says, in fact, he would rather die than have any one deprive him of the opportunity to exemplify in his own life the principle of sacrificing rights for the edification of others. And Paul never used the phrase, “I would rather die . . .” in a flippant way. He was “deadly” serious about this principle! He did *not* mean to say he *boasted* about his own sacrifices in an arrogant, self-righteous way. Paul uses the word *boasting* (Gr. *kauchema*, glorying) in the good sense, meaning, “to hold up or exalt as an example of Christian virtue” (see II Cor. 7:14-15). This translation clarifies the true meaning of the next three verses.

In light of the above remarks we should paraphrase verse 16, "When I preach the gospel I have nothing to hold up or exalt as an example of Christian sacrifice—necessity lies upon me, I feel compelled to do so. I am utterly miserable and unsatisfied if I do not preach the gospel." Paul discusses his compulsion for preaching in II Corinthians 5:11-21.

The highwater mark of Christian discipleship is when a person freely chooses to give up his rights in order to remove any obstacle to the gospel of Christ being heard or seen. Giving up "rights" did not hinder Paul in his race toward the highest good God could make of his life. In fact, this discipline sharpened his self-control (cf. 9:24-27) and became beneficial in the development of godliness in him. His choice to give up the right to financial support from the Corinthians gave him opportunity to perfect his character in the area of servanthood and helpfulness. This actually helped Paul form within himself the very nature of Christ. Jesus is the perfect example of self-control and servanthood rather than rights. Having every right to expect the disciples to wash *his* feet (John 13), he washed theirs instead. One cannot be a disciple of Jesus unless he is willing to *forfeit* rights rather than let them become obstacles to the gospel. There is only one way to serve God and that is to serve mankind. If we are going to serve sinful and imperfect men, inevitably, somewhere, we will have to choose to forfeit some of our rights. Jesus did! (Phil. 2:5-11).

9:17-18 Satisfaction: What does Paul mean, "For if I do this of my own will . . ."? Did he not preach by choice? Certainly! Remember, he is speaking about the relinquishment of certain rights which were his because he *was* a full-time preacher of the gospel. Paul is trying to convince these Corinthians that there are *greater rewards* to be found in the relinquishment of rights.

We might paraphrase verses 17 and 18 thus, "If preaching is simply my way of choosing to make a living, I should be, and will be, rewarded with my living; if I could make a living another way, and I could, but I have chosen to preach anyway, then it is apparent that I consider preaching more than a way to make a living—I consider it a divine stewardship with which I have been entrusted. What reward, then, or satisfaction do I receive, if I receive no financial support? Just this: my pay is to do without pay! My joy is in making the gospel free of charge in order that no one might use the idea of my right to financial support as an obstacle to the truth of God." Paul would not allow the slightest hint of profiteering or exploitation to be found in his ministry (cf. II Cor. 2:17; 4:2).

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Great satisfaction comes from giving up rights when others may be served for the sake of Christ. Paul refused to lose the satisfaction he received in such service by *insisting* on a few rights or liberties. He would rather die than be robbed of the great enjoyment he received in sacrificing for others. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:38). Satisfaction and contentment is part of a godly character. God has given us the freedom to choose to renounce certain freedoms or rights he has given us in order to have this contentment. This satisfaction which Paul enjoyed is somewhat like the satisfaction a mother or father gets when giving up one of their "rights" to help a precious child. It is the satisfaction a teacher gets when he surrenders one of his "rights" to help a student reach his highest potential. It is the satisfaction a craftsman gets when he gives up his "right" to sleep and to food in order to produce the finest work of which his hands are capable. Paul was no masochist. He did not give up financial support because he loved to suffer. He sought no self-righteous merit (cf. Phil. 3:1-16). His aim was to glorify Christ and present no obstacle whatsoever to the salvation of any man. If Paul had been persuaded that *refusing* the financial support might become an obstacle, he would not have refused it. Could refusal ever become a problem? Apparently the Corinthians made it a hindrance to accepting Paul's apostleship (cf. II Cor. 11:7-11; 12:11-18; II Thess. 1:9; 3:8). And even in modern times, some self-supporting preachers and missionaries have found it an obstacle to their ministries.

The comments of Fred Fisher, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, pg. 146, pub. Word, are pertinent here:

Paul would have rebelled against the modern practice of paying preachers a salary as if they were mercenaries selling their services. He would have insisted, I think, that churches should support their ministers. There may not seem to be much difference between giving a minister so much support and paying him the same amount in salary. The money is the same. But the principle is not. "Salary" implies payment for services received. "Support" implies that the church enables the minister to be free from worldly concerns so that he may carry on his ministry. His "reward" should not be earthly, but heavenly. The problem is that the misuse of the word "salary" may lead both the church and the minister to take a worldly view of the ministry.

Though the modern preacher has a right to expect the church to support his ministry with financial remuneration, he should be willing to relinquish that right should it become an obstacle to the proclamation of the gospel. Furthermore, no Christian preacher should consider financial support his source of satisfaction in the ministry. His satisfaction (“boasting”) should be found in servanthood.

SECTION 3

Reasons For Relinquishment (9:19-27)

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; ²⁷but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

9:19-22 To Save Some: It is important that Paul lists the salvation of others as his first reason for willingness to relinquish rights. This is the priority he is trying to establish in the consciences of the Corinthians.

When Paul says he is free from all men, he means he is free from being bound by any man’s scruples (see I Cor. 10:23, 29, 30; Rom. 14:1-4). He does *not* mean that he has no moral obligation to be his “brother’s keeper.” All men have that liability. And this is exactly the point to be made in this passage. Though free from the scruples of all men, Paul will gladly relinquish this freedom and submit to

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their scruples in order to win them to Christ. He does more than merely acknowledge other men's right to have and to practice scruples different than his, he declares his practice is to enslave (Gr. *edoulosa*, aorist tense, "enslaved at some point in the past") himself to other men's scruples in order to save them. The Greek word translated *win* is *kerdeso* and often translated *gain* (as in money or business profit); it is used metaphorically in the scriptures to describe winning someone to the gospel. When we win someone to Christ, we not only gain them for Jesus, we gain a brother (see Matt. 18:15) and are ourselves profited. This is Paul's motivation for sacrificing any right to "gain a brother."

Paul was a Jew. He was reared in the strictest sect of the Jewish culture—the Pharisees (see Phil. 3:4-6). We would suppose he preferred to practice, whenever possible, Jewish cultural habits. He undoubtedly preferred *kosher* food as much as Peter (cf. Acts 10:14); he carried with him the Jewish abhorrence of images and idols (see Acts 17); he went customarily to Jewish synagogues to worship and preach; he practiced Jewish purifications (Acts 21:26) in order to conciliate his Jewish brethren; he defended himself against the charges that he had profaned the Jewish temple (Acts 24:5-21); and reminded Agrippa that he had always lived among the Jews according to the strictest sect of the Pharisees (Acts 26:2-8). When he was among the Jews, Paul honored their Jewish scruples and lived as they did, ate what they ate, abstained from that which they considered unclean, observed their days and seasons. However, when any Jewish brother demanded that Paul keep the law of Moses as a necessity for salvation or membership in the kingdom of God (the church), he vehemently and immediately denounced it as apostasy (cf. Galatians, Romans and Hebrews). He would have Timothy to become circumcised in order not to offend his Jewish brethren (Acts 16:1-4), and on the other hand, he would refuse to yield to the Judaizers who insisted he compel Titus to be circumcised (Gal. 2:3) in order to keep the law of Moses. All this he did in order to bring as many Jews as he could into the saving grace of Christ.

And it was the amazing grace of Christ that could make this Pharisee of the Pharisees, Paul, equally at ease involving himself in Gentile culture ("those outside the law"). He was truthful and firm, but never rude and insulting toward Gentiles for their belief in idols (cf. Acts 19:37). He was so thoroughly familiar with their philosophies, arts, and politics he could communicate the gospel to them in their

frame-of-reference (Acts 17:22-33; 16:35-39). He fellowshiped with Gentile Christians as his brethren and defended their gospel liberties even against the "pillars of the church" (Gal. 2:1-21). He could eat with unbelievers and even partake of meat sacrificed to idols without wounding his own conscience (I Cor. 10:27-30). Paul could be knowledgeable, courteous and friendly toward unbelievers, and could freely fellowship with Gentile Christian brethren in an atmosphere of perfect equality. But he would never use his liberty as license for immorality (see I Peter 2:16; Gal. 5:13; I Cor. 8:9). Paul considered himself under law to Christ (Rom. 6:12-23). The "law" of Christ is the law of love (Rom. 12:10; II Cor. 5:14; I Tim. 1:5; John 13:34-35; 15:12-17; Gal. 5:14; Col. 3:14-15; James 2:8; Matt. 22:39-40). Love is more compelling and constraining than any law (I Cor. 13:1-13; I John 3:14-24; 4:7-12; 4:13-21). Only under the compulsion of Christ's love is there power to relinquish one's rights for the salvation of another. Only in the constraint of Christ's love is there power to keep the commandments of God's *new* covenant in daily living. Every condescension Paul-the-Jew made to Gentile culture he did so in order to win every Gentile he could to Christ. But he would never participate in any cultural usage, Gentile or Jewish, which compromised the new covenant of faith in Christ.

To the overscrupulous (Jew or Gentile) Paul became scrupulous. He would observe any man's scruples so long as that man did not attempt to bind them on others as *necessary* to covenant relationship with Christ. Every Christian has the same obligation toward all men (cf. I Cor. 8:7; Rom. 15:1; I Thess. 5:14; I Cor. 13:4-7; Acts 20:35, I Cor. 10:33).

In the latter half of verse 22, the verb *gegona* is perfect tense and means, "I *became*, and am *becoming*, all things to all men." It is something he had practiced ever since becoming a Christian and would continue to practice. His statement here does *not* mean he became a two-faced hypocrite. It does *not* mean he compromised any doctrinal or ethical truth. It simply means he tried to project himself into each individual's circumstances as much as possible in order to win them to Christ. It means he made every attempt possible to *understand* the thinking, feelings and actions of others. It means he had an honest interest in people as persons and not just as numerical-conversions. Someone once described teaching, medicine, and the ministry as "the three patronizing professions." But when we "patronize" people we make no effort to understand them—no effort to find some

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point of personal contact. Paul did *not* patronize people. He made every effort to understand them and live with them within their own cultural, educational and social milieu. The Living Bible paraphrases I Corinthians 9:22: "Whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him." One of the greatest hindrances to the spread of the Gospel throughout the world is that people of all races and cultures simply do not try to understand one another in matters not clearly commanded in the New Testament. Even Christian people are unwilling to forfeit their rights in order to make such understanding possible. Until Restoration Movement people are willing to sacrifice some of their overly-cherished Anglo-Saxon traditions and customs in order to "understand where others are coming from" we will never accomplish the great ideal for which the Movement began—Christian unity!

9:23-27 To Save Self: The Greek phrase (verse 23), *panta de poio dia to euaggelion hina sugkoinonos autou genomai*, should be translated "All these things I do because of the gospel in order that I may become a joint partaker of it." One commentator insists, "The suggestion that this (verse) means, 'lest I lose my share in salvation' (ICC), misses Paul's meaning. The context indicates that he was concerned with the salvation of others, but that he had no doubt about his own." In the first place, the Greek preposition *dia* denotes "cause or reason." In the second place the Greek verb *genomai* is in the subjunctive mood and indicates Paul was *hoping* to become a joint partaker. In the third place the *context* (9:23-27) *does* suggest Paul feared he would lose his share in the gospel if he did not run so as to obtain it.

Even the word *prize* (verse 24) reinforces the idea that Paul was concerned with the possibility of forfeiting his share in the gospel. The Greek word *brabeion* is translated *prize* and is related to the Greek word *brabeuo* which means "to decide, arbitrate, rule, umpire, award, referee." The *brabeion* was the *prize* awarded by the referees or "rulers" of the Greek games to an athlete who won his race or other contest (see Phil. 3:14; Col. 3:15). The Corinthian brethren would understand immediately the figure of the Greek games as an analogy of the Christian life. Since the time of Alexander the Great, athletic games had been popular throughout the Greek world. The most famous, of course, were the Olympic Games held at Olympia (located in the Peloponnesus). The first games in recorded history were held in 776 B.C. The Roman emperor Nero drove a *quadriga*

(a chariot pulled by four horses) in the races in 66 A.D. (about 10 years after Paul wrote this letter). Nero was thrown from his chariot and nearly crushed to death; restored to his chariot he continued the contest for a while, but gave up before the end of the course. The *brabeus* (judge or referee), however, knew an emperor from an athlete and awarded Nero the crown of victory. Overcome with happiness when the crowd applauded him, he announced that thereafter not only Athens and Sparta but all Greece should be exempt from any tribute to Rome. The Greek cities accommodated him by running the Olympian, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian games in one year; he responded by taking part in all of them. The Isthmian games were second in popularity only to the Olympics, and were held every third year. Paul must have been an avid sports fan, for he used athletic contests often to illustrate his messages (cf. Phil. 3:14; Gal. 5:7; II Tim. 2:5; 4:7-8; Heb. 12:1).

The Greek word *agonizomenos* is translated *athlete* in verse 25. Its literal meaning is "one who struggles, one who contends, one who agonizes." Our English word *agony* comes from this word. Jesus' struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane is called *agonia* (Luke 22:44). Jude writes that Christians are to "contend earnestly" (Gr. *epagonizesthai*) for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Right relationship with God is a *struggle*—make no mistake about that! It involves agony and pressure. Christians are contenders, combatants, strugglers.

Every "agonizer" (athlete) must exercise self-control in all things in order to compete as a winner. Paul uses the Greek word *egkrateuetai* translated *temperate* in the KJV, but *self-control* in the RSV. It literally means, "within-strength," or "inner-strength." Self-control is the fruit of the Spirit of God in the Christian (Gal. 5:23). Self-control is what the Christian must "make every effort to" add to his life as a supplement to faith, knowledge, virtue, etc. (II Peter 1:6). Athletes in the Greek games had to endure, according to Horace, the regimen of obedience, sparse diet, and severe training for ten months before he was qualified to enter the actual game. Modern athletes spend weeks and months disciplining their minds and bodies in rigorous training and competition. Some modern professional golfers have been known to practice swinging their clubs until their hands are blistered and bleeding. These all submit to self-discipline in order to win a perishable trophy. Should not Christians, then, be willing and able to exercise self-control for the imperishable crown of eternal

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life? Should not Christians be willing and able to relinquish a few "rights" or "freedoms" in order to win the game of life?

For Paul there was no *uncertainty* in his regimen of self-discipline. He did not run his race of life *aimlessly* (Gr. *adelos*, unevident, unclear, uncertain). He did not consider the Christian struggle a session in "shadow-boxing" or quixotic jousting with windmills. For him the Christian life was a contest to win, a war in which there was no substitute for victory (Eph. 6:10-23). It was a trial that demanded *severe* self-discipline.

In verse 27 the Greek word *hupopiazō* is translated *pommel* and means literally, "to give a black eye by striking the face." Figuratively Paul is saying, "I beat my body black and blue . . ." to keep it under control. It is inconceivable that Paul is saying he practiced literal flagellation (whipping) of his own flesh. He clearly taught that *literal* severity to the body was of no real spiritual value (Col. 2:18, 23; I Tim. 4:1-3; 4:8; Rom. 13:14). Withdrawal into a monastery and daily scourging of the flesh does not solve the problem of worldly-mindedness. It may, in fact, intensify it by pride in self-righteousness. The other Greek word in verse 27, *doulagōgō*, translated *subdue*, is literally, *lead as a slave*. This clarifies Paul's practice of self-control. He, Paul, that is, his *mind*, controlled by the Spirit of Christ, led his *body* as a slave. He articulated this with precision in Romans 6:12-23; 8:5-11; 12:1-8.

Athletes set goals. Their goal is always to win! They must be willing to give up any "freedom" which might be a hindrance to reaching that goal. The Christian's goal is to be transformed in character into the image of Christ. Christians need to see the goal *clearly*. One of the most distressing things about modern man is the obvious aimlessness and distortion in setting this as a goal. If any Christian is not willing to give up whatever is necessary for him and others to attain the highest potential God has for them, that Christian will, at the end of the race, find himself rejected. *Adokimos* is the Greek word translated *disqualified*. It is a word from the ancient alchemist (who was both a pharmacologist and a metallurgist) and his practice of testing metals and *casting aside* those which were spurious.

This is not the final word of the New Testament on Christian freedom. But it is perhaps the clearest and most persuasive presentation to be found. Only the teachings and examples of the Living Word, Jesus Christ, are more compelling.

The man who has surrendered to evil and rebellion against God has imprisoned his "self" behind walls of fear, alienation, hate,

falsehood and impotence. Man was not made for that kind of character. He cannot be free with that nature controlling him. Those characteristics severely limit any potentiality he may have for growth into the image of Christ. The man who is good only because there is a law standing in his way to being bad is not free either. The only man who is truly free, is the man who is good because he wants to be good for Jesus' sake. It is Jesus Christ who makes us free men by making us new creatures through regeneration. His Spirit is born in us and we are changed into His image from one degree of glory to another as we surrender to his new commandment (compulsion) of love.

APPLICATIONS:

1. Are you *free* in Christ? Free to do what? Do you really *feel* free or do you feel bound? Is freedom ever free of all responsibility?
2. Do you believe all Christians are obligated to give financial support to the ministers of the gospel?
3. How much financial support do you think they should have?
4. What do you think would be the result if all present-day preachers and missionaries decided to find employment away from their ministries in order to support themselves? Would the church survive? grow?
5. Have you ever relinquished any conscientious right belonging to you as a Christian for the sake of a "weaker" brother?
6. Would you rather die than cause a weaker brother to stumble?
7. How far would you go in accommodating yourself to a foreign culture in order to save lost sinners? How far should you go?
8. Could you give up celebrating Thanksgiving if it offended someone? Could you drink a glass of wine with your meal if the culture where you ministered expected it? Could you give up the use of a musical instrument in worship if it offended someone?
9. How much self-control do you exercise in order to be faithful to Christ? In what things or areas? Are you satisfied with your self-control?

APPREHENSIONS:

1. What is freedom?
2. What has the word of God to do with the Christian's freedom?

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3. Should the Christian guard his freedom in Christ? How?
4. What does the Bible say about financial support for ministers of the gospel?
5. Did Paul's decision not to ask the Corinthian church for financial support have any bad effects? What?
6. Is preaching the gospel more than a way to make a living? What is it?
7. What rights would Paul have to relinquish to make his ministry effective among the Jews? among the Gentiles? did he?
8. When Paul said he became "all things to all men" did he mean he could participate in anything anyone else did? What did he mean? Would you?
9. Was Paul afraid there was a possibility that he might lose his share in salvation? Is the Christian life a serious matter? How serious?
10. What is self-control? How does a Christian control self?