

## 1 Corinthians 9B (2013)

- Today we study part three of Paul's teaching on liberty and its limits
  - As you know, this topic runs from chapters 8-10 and began with the question of whether it was proper to eat meat sacrificed to idols
    - In the course of answering the question, Paul has embarked upon a discussion of the nature of Christian liberty
    - First, Paul taught in chapter 8 that liberty must be exercised with love for others
    - Secondly, Paul pointed to himself as an example of one who forgoes liberty out of concern for others
    - Finally, Paul defended his decision to forgo receiving financial support against those who claimed it was proof he wasn't an apostle
      - He argued that he still had a right to their support even as he refused it
  - Let's pick up in chapter 9 where Paul was explaining his refusal to accept support

**[1Cor. 9:14](#)** So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

**[1Cor. 9:15](#)** But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.

- As we saw last week, Paul made abundantly clear that those who proclaim the Gospel have an expectation to receive their living from the gospel
  - The minister who is devoted to proclaiming the Good News has every right to receive the support of those he serves
    - As Jesus Himself said when instructing the disciples:

**[Luke 10:7](#)** "Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.

- Such were Paul and Barnabas, laborers serving God's people and worthy of their wages
- Nevertheless these men chose not to take advantage of this right in Corinth
  - Paul says he used none of these things
  - Notice the word things is plural, meaning he refused donations of support given on his behalf
- Instead, Paul and Barnabas chose to work for their living instead
  - This is a meaningful and commendable choice on Paul's part
  - He took upon himself added burden he didn't have to take
- It's a great reminder to ministers today that forgoing financial support is an option we may take when circumstances warrant
  - But we do so only when it's the better course for the sake of the Gospel
  - But as we learned last week, a minister's choice in this matter has no bearing on our collective responsibility to offer support
  - We are not to muzzle the ox we depend upon for our spiritual nourishment
- In Paul case, he made his decision for two reasons
  - First, by forgoing his personal liberty he was showing love for the church by avoiding placing a financial burden upon them
    - Paul alludes to this purpose in this chapter
    - But he explains it most clearly in another letter, 2Corinthians
    - In that letter, Paul once again reminds the church of his choice to forgo support and says it was intended as a benefit for their sakes

**2Cor. 12:11** I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.

**2Cor. 12:12** The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

[2Cor. 12:13](#) For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

[2Cor. 12:14](#) Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.

- Sarcastically, Paul asks the church to “forgive him” for not placing a financial burden upon them
  - Apparently, his refusal to accept their support was interpreted by the church as an insult as if Paul was treating them as inferior or poor by refusing support
  - Paul says they should have perceived it as a blessing
  - Because he was trying not to be a burden upon the church
- There was a second reason Paul chose not to restrict his personal liberty in Corinth
  - In v.15 Paul says it would be better for him to die than to start receiving their support
    - Why was Paul so adamantly opposed to being paid for his ministry work in Corinth?
    - Paul answers saying that he didn’t want his boast to be made empty
  - The boast he’s speaking about is the claim that Paul served the church without receiving reward for his service
    - Had the church turned around now, as a result of Paul’s letter, to begin providing financial support, it would have made Paul’s boast empty
    - Paul didn’t want his reward on earth...he was looking for a heavenly reward

[1Cor. 9:16](#) For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

[1Cor. 9:17](#) For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

[1Cor. 9:18](#) What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

- Paul explains that merely preaching the Gospel in Corinth was not a cause by itself for the Lord to reward him
  - Paul says he couldn't expect the Lord to reward Him merely for spreading the Gospel because Paul was under compulsion to do so
    - When the Lord appeared to Paul on the road, the Lord commanded Paul to preach
    - Here's how the Lord explained His plan for Paul

[Acts 9:15](#) But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

[Acts 9:16](#) for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

- Paul was under compulsion to serve God
  - He might have refused, in the manner of a Jonah
  - But woe to such a man, as Paul himself acknowledges
  - So how could Paul boast in what was already expected?
    - It would be like an employee bragging about showing up for work everyday
    - Or Ken bragging about showing up for church every Sunday
    - That's already expected, so we can't boast about it
- In v.17 Paul says if he were preaching voluntarily, then he might have reason to brag and receive reward
  - But Paul was arrested on the road against his will and he was assigned this mission of suffering and sacrifice against his will
    - Paul didn't ask for these things, and he certainly didn't want for them when he was still Saul persecuting Christians
    - Paul says the Lord entrusted Paul with a stewardship, a caretaker responsibility, to deliver the Gospel to the Gentiles
    - The Lord stepped into this life, changed him and gave him a new mission in life

- So when Paul preached the message of the Gospel and suffered persecution, he was just doing what he was told
  - Nevertheless, Paul still wanted to have something to boast about when he stood before Christ to receive his judgment
  - And so that brings us to the second reason Paul determined not to receive financial support
- In v.18 Paul says his reward will come from his decision to preach the Gospel at no charge
  - He set aside his liberty, choosing not to make full use of his right to receive support
  - And he did this to show love to the brethren and in the hope of being more effective in the ministry of the Gospel

**[1Cor. 9:19](#)** For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.

**[1Cor. 9:20](#)** To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;

**[1Cor. 9:21](#)** to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.

**[1Cor. 9:22](#)** To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

**[1Cor. 9:23](#)** I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

- Paul declares though he was free from all men
  - When he says he was free, he means he had the same liberty all men receive in knowing and following Christ
    - He was free from the restrictions of the Mosaic Law
    - He was free from the judgment of men concerning righteousness
    - He could make decisions about how to live without worry for how those decisions impacted his position before the Lord
  - Nevertheless, Paul voluntarily assumed additional certain burdens and restrictions to be as effective as possible in ministry

- For example, Paul says when he was ministering among Jewish people, he assumed a lifestyle that was pleasing to the Jew
- In assuming these restrictions, Paul voluntarily set aside some of his liberty
- He made this choice to appease the Jews and create a cultural connection with them to improve his opportunity to present the Gospel
- And around Gentiles, Paul adopted a different lifestyle, one that probably made Paul a little uncomfortable and may have even offended him a little
  - Here again, Paul was making lifestyle choices that restricted his liberty
  - But he made these decisions to win men to the Gospel, whether Jew or Gentile, whether strong men or weak men
- Notice Paul makes clear that these choices weren't a requirement...they were a choice he made to earn reward
  - He says he wasn't under the Law of Moses even when he lived like the Jews...it was his choice
  - And when he lived like a Gentile, he knew better than to think he was living without any law
    - He knew he was always under the law of Christ
  - But he did these things to for the sake of the Gospel and so that he may become a partaker in it
    - Obviously, Paul was already saved by his faith alone
    - So when he says he was working to become a partaker of the Gospel, he means he wished to share in the reward given to those who preach the Gospel
- If we study Paul's example carefully, we arrive at some basic principles for how we may set aside our own liberty with an eye toward our eternal reward
  - First, our attitude in life should be how can I accommodate another through self-restraint
    - So many Christians seem only interested in showing off their liberties

- But we see Paul always looking for ways to restrain his freedom
- So should we focus our attention on how we can restrain our freedoms rather than allowing them to rule us
- Secondly, Paul restrain himself for specific purposes related to the Gospel
  - He was seeking to advance the purposes of the Gospel in love
  - Whether Paul moved left or right, front or back, he made every lifestyle decision with an eye toward how it impacted his effectiveness in ministry
- Thirdly, Paul never placed undue emphasis on certain rules
  - Paul knew he wasn't bound by the Mosaic Law, but he always remembered he was accountable to the Law of Christ
  - Likewise, we must be willing to adopt or cast off any rule of life if it helps us win souls for Christ while always obeying Christ's commands
  - Any self-restriction not directly related to advancing the purpose of the Gospel is nothing more than self-righteousness
  - We can't allow any restriction to become an end in itself
  - Do whatever you do for eternal purposes
- Finally, we see how Paul used his self-sacrifice as opportunity for the Lord to bless him
  - Paul wasn't the only man living under compulsion
  - We all have certain obligations, and we fulfill those expectations as a matter of duty
  - If we merely do what we are already commanded to do, then a reward isn't in the cards
    - But when we decide voluntarily to use our life to serve the Lord, then we are working to gain reward
  - We can't think that assembling at church regularly, saying our prayers at night, and staying out of trouble will gain us reward

- Those things are expected, because we've been commanded in scripture to do those things
  - Reward comes from voluntary service to God, Paul says
- And Paul ends this chapter on the topic of personal reward

**1Cor. 9:24** Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

**1Cor. 9:25** Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

**1Cor. 9:26** Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

**1Cor. 9:27** but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- This is the second time in this letter that Paul has turned the church's questions to the issue of a Christian's eternal reward
  - Paul uses an analogy of a sports competition to explain to the church in Corinth why every Christian has good reason to exercise self-control
    - Paul says every Christian is running in a great foot race
    - Our Christian walk of life is the race, to mix my metaphors
  - Every Christian is running, but Paul says only one receives the prize
    - Paul is make a comparison to the ancient Olympic games of Greece where runners competed for honor
    - There was no second or third place awarded in the Greek games
      - You had won winner and the rest were losers
    - So Paul commands the church to run your Christian race in such a way that you may win your race
- As we continue to examine this analogy, we need to understand both the similarities and differences of the comparison
  - For example, in the Greek games, an athlete competes against other runners for a singular prize
    - But in the Christian race, we are not competing against other Christians but against ourselves

- Our performance will be compared to what we might have done with the opportunities the Lord gives us
- And Paul explained that our opportunities have been prepared by the Lord so that we might please Him

**Eph. 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

- And Jesus Himself taught in Luke 12:48 that to whom much is given, much is expected
- So we compete against our own opportunities
- Secondly, in the Greek games, there was but one prize for each race, but in the Christian race, the prizes are endless
  - Remember earlier in chapter 2 Paul said that eye has not see nor ear heard nor could men even imagine all that the Lord has prepared for those who love Him
  - So don't be jealous of another Christian lives a life of excellence
  - Rather, we should celebrate their faithfulness and seek to emulate it
  - They have win their prize, and we may yet still win ours
- And that's Paul's advice to this church and to us as well
  - In v.24 Paul says run your Christian race to win
    - Just like an athlete that disciplines his body during training so he will compete well, we must exercise self-discipline to please the Lord and earn our reward
    - If an athlete is willing to endure great physical pain to arrive at a perishable wreath, then certainly we can endure a loss of freedom to earn an imperishable reward
  - So Paul exercised sound judgment, careful strategy and enormous self-discipline to ensure he could win the contest
    - Using more sports analogies, Paul says he ran with specific goals, not aimlessly
    - He boxed so that he hit his target, he didn't just beat at the air

- Paul lived his life concerned with being disqualified from sharing in the rewards that he might otherwise receive for preaching the Gospel
  - Likewise, we must make strategic decisions about how to exercise our liberties
  - We must learn the lessons Paul has given us in these examples
  - We recognize that all of us have liberty to live in many ways, but we must consider each decision with an understanding that we are planning a race
  - That race has the opportunity to bring us reward or bring us loss
  - We must think strategically
  - We must be willing to exercise self-control
  - And all these things we do so that the purposes of Gospel will be accomplished in our choices