

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

Living Within Our Liberty (For The Sake Of The Gospel Of God)

March 8th, 2015

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

Rev. Paul Carter

(Note to Worship Leader: This morning we will have the Scripture passage read by a member of the worship team immediately prior to the message. It must be read in the ESV. Please work with the reader to ensure that all words can be pronounced. The full text is printed below for word count purposes only – I will not be re-reading it.)

¹ Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus 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 eat and drink? ⁵ Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do 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? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

⁸ Do I say these things 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 treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Does he not speak certainly for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

¹² If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? 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. ¹³ Do 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? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

¹⁵ But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. ¹⁶ For 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! ¹⁷ For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:1-18 ESV)

Introduction:

Good morning! Once again I'd like to invite you to have your Bibles open to the Scripture that was just read. That's on page 956 in your pew Bible. As I mentioned last week this chapter is part of a 3 chapter argument that Paul is making that climaxes in chapter 10 verses 31-32.

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:31–32 ESV)

In all of these complex moral and spiritual questions the key is to concern ourselves primarily with two things: the glory of God and the spiritual welfare of other people. Those are the inner motivations – motivations TIGHTER THAN the outer motivations of the law – that guide the true Christian in all of his or her decision making. Mature Christians don't ask: "Is this permissible for me"; they ask "will this serve the glory of God" and "will this help and encourage the faith of God's people".

Paul introduces this point in chapter 8 in order to answer a question about meat sacrificed to idols. He will return to the topic of idolatry in chapter 10 which makes some Bible readers think that chapter 9 is a little bit out of place. In chapter 8 we're talking about idolatry, in chapter 10 we're talking about idolatry but in chapter 9 we seem to be talking about the rights of Gospel workers – what gives? This is a classic Pauline digression! Scholars refer to this as "A-B-A" structure or sometimes as "sandwich structure". By the way, this is a Jewish thing, not just a Pauline thing. Jewish brains are eastern brains, not western brains and therefore they are not always as logical and linear as we are used to. Sometimes they take a step to the side in order to eventually move forward – Jesus did this all the time. The Gospel of Mark has several classic "A-B-A" or "sandwich structure" passages. When you get home look up Mark 5:21-43 for an example. The point is that the story or paragraph in the middle often helps us understand the main thrust of the argument on the outsides. So here. Paul digresses – he steps to the side for a moment – in order to speak about his own life. Not because he has ADHD but because he will then use his life to illustrate his main concern. Paul says: "My life as an apostle demonstrates what it looks like to live well within your permission out of concern for the Gospel of God."

To understand the point that he is developing we need to understand two things. We need to understand the rights of Gospel workers and we need to understand why Paul is not claiming those rights among the Corinthian people. First of all then:

What Are The Rights Of Gospel Workers?

Look at verse 1:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?
(1 Corinthians 9:1 ESV)

Paul first of all establishes the fact that he is an authorized Gospel worker of the highest order. He is an Apostle of Jesus Christ. This chapter of 1 Corinthians is filled with rhetorical questions. A rhetorical question is a question that everybody already knows the answer to. You ask a rhetorical question to prove a point, not to get an answer. In Greek, unlike in English, you always know the answer to a rhetorical question because an indicator is embedded in the question. If the answer is “yes” then you embed an *ou*, if the answer is no then you embed a *me*. It would be like if in English when you asked a rhetorical question expecting a yes answer you put a question mark at the end and if you expected a no you put an upside down question mark at the end. All of these questions assume a yes answer. Everybody knows that Paul is an apostle. He is a Gospel worker of the highest order. Whatever any Gospel worker is entitled to, Paul is MORE entitled to. That’s the point he wants to make first. Now look at verses 4-

⁴Do we not have the right to eat and drink?⁵Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?⁶Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? (1 Corinthians 9:4–6 ESV)

Paul is establishing a point that no one in Corinth would argue with. Gospel workers have the right to material support sufficient for their living and that of their immediate family. In modern English we would say: “Gospel workers have the right to a living wage”. Everybody understands that, Paul says. That is a universal principle. People should earn a living wage from whatever they labor at. If something takes more than 10 hours a week to do, you generally have to pay them to do it. Not because they don’t care, not because they aren’t motivated by higher concerns but simply because people have to eat. People have to pay their hydro bills. People have children to feed and clothe and if you want people to dedicate significant amounts of time to

things you think are important than you have to pay them. Everyone in the universe understands that and furthermore, Paul says, that principle comes from the Bible. He quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 to make his point:

For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” (1 Corinthians 9:9 ESV)

And then to completely seal the deal he quotes Jesus:

In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:14 ESV)

That quotation is from Luke 10:7. Case closed, Paul says, Gospel workers – particularly apostles – particularly YOUR APOSTLE have the right to a living wage. That is the right of every full time Gospel worker and that is generally the way things are done. However, in verse 12 and then again in verse 15 Paul says that he has not made use of that right when laboring among the Corinthians. The second question we want to answer then is this:

Why Did Paul Not Claim Those Rights Among The Corinthians?

I’ve phrased the question the way I have because Paul did make use of those rights in other places. He was very generously supported by the Macedonian churches such as the church in Philippi. In fact scholars suggest that one of the misunderstandings that Paul has to clear up in 2 Corinthians relates to the fact that he continued to accept financial support from the Philippians even after he had ceased to minister there. The Philippians seem to have taken Paul on as a missionary and the Corinthians were offended because he never accepted any financial support from them. The fact that Paul sometimes did and sometimes did not receive financial support leads us to conclude that there were some other issues at play. It seems that there were TWO main reasons why Paul sometimes did not accept financial support in certain places. First of all:

1. Paul never wanted to hinder the spread of the Gospel

If accepting financial support would be a barrier to the spread of the Gospel in a particular region, Paul simply wouldn’t do it. But sometimes it wouldn’t and so he did. Obviously then, we want

to dig a little deeper to see if we can't ferret out some of the factors that Paul considered when making that difficult decision. I think by reading the whole Corinthian correspondence and by reading the Book of Acts we can detect three significant considerations. First of all:

i. Was the church located in a pioneer field?

Paul liked to work in places that had not yet been penetrated by the Gospel. He said that himself:

I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation (Romans 15:20 ESV)

Because of that ambition, Paul often found himself working in areas that did not have an established church. It's hard and probably inappropriate to ask non-believers for financial support! Paul was smart enough to know that new Christians need to be very certain that the Gospel is not being shared with them out of any sort of financial motivation. New churches often cannot support full time Christian labor. This principle has become widely accepted by Christian mission organizations. When missionaries are sent into unreached areas they almost never ask for any money from the target population. They are supported either by tent making labors or by the gifts of Christians from more established regions. That is most likely the primary reason Paul did not accept financial support from some of his churches.

ii. Were there any complicating cultural factors specific to the field?

We mentioned in one of the first messages in this series that Corinth had a culture of professional rhetoric. Unlike the Macedonian churches that were very poor and working class, unlike the churches in Jewish areas that had a more rabbinical tradition, some of the classically Greco-Roman cities had a culture of professional rhetoric that might potentially obscure the simplicity and power of Gospel ministry. Paul hints at that concern back in chapter 1. He says that God sent him to Corinth to:

preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1 Corinthians 1:17 ESV)

Paul made a special effort to distance himself from the culture of professional rhetoric that so

dominated the Corinthian landscape. Stop and hear that. So often in the church today we bend over backwards and make all kinds of awkward accommodations in our efforts to NARROW THE GAP between us and our surrounding culture. Paul did the opposite. He sometimes went to extreme measures to WIDEN THE GAP and to maintain the DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER of Gospel ministry. Think about that. Let me make an application. This would be like planting a church in the theatre district of Toronto and in order for people not to think we were just another “professional act” we make the decision to go low tech, low sound, low drama – just basic Gospel preaching, a cappella singing and prayer. Now, is that kind of approach always required? Of course not. But might it in certain circumstances be useful in order to maintain a certain necessary contrast? Yes, it might well be. Paul paid attention to such things

Thirdly and lastly, Paul was careful to ask:

iii. Would receiving support undermine Paul’s authority as a Gospel worker?

Again, we have to understand Greco-Roman culture. In Greco-Roman culture gifts were never without obligation. Let me quote from Ciampa and Rosner:

“The offer of a gift constituted an offer of friendship. While in theory it was voluntary and disinterested, it was intended to place the recipient under an obligation to repay... Through this system, ‘people of high status ... used their wealth ... to form alliances, to secure power, as a form of security and protection against personal and political enemies.’”¹

As the Corinthian correspondence unfolds we begin to see that there were some very rich folks in the church at Corinth who seemed to have an interest in trying to control Paul and they tried to do that with money. Paul saw that and therefore refused to take anything from them. There is an important point here for pastors and for churches. When a church pays their pastor they do not purchase his tongue. God owns his tongue. He must speak as God directs and as Scripture demands. Now to be clear, it is the job of the elders in a church to ensure that the pastor preaches in accordance with Scripture but it is not the job of the elders to ensure that the preacher says that they want him to say. It takes maturity to know the difference and it seems that the Corinthians weren’t there yet and so Paul refused their support.

¹ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 410-411.

The second reason that Paul would not receive financial support from the Corinthians was that:

2. Paul desired to receive a reward

Look at verses 16-17:

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 still entrusted with a stewardship. (1 Corinthians 9:16–17 ESV)

Paul is saying something very interesting here, he is saying that reward begins where obligation ends. Let me say that again; reward begins where obligation ends. Once again Paul appears to be influenced by Luke's Gospel². Look in your Bibles at Luke 17:7-10, we read this passage just a few days ago in our RMM readings:

⁷“Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? ⁸Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? ⁹Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’” (Luke 17:7–10 ESV)

What is Jesus saying there? He is saying that servants who fulfill their obligations are not entitled to special reward and recognition. They are simply doing what they are required to do. You don't get a reward for not committing adultery. You don't get a reward for tithing or going to church or raising your children or paying your taxes. As a Christian you are **REQUIRED TO DO THOSE THINGS** so don't expect a parade in heaven for simply doing your job. Paul applies that to himself. He says the preaching of the Gospel is a necessity that is laid upon me. I have to do it. Woe unto me if I do not. Therefore, there is no reward for me in preaching the Gospel – Jesus is my master and he told me to do it. Simply doing it earns me nothing.

Pause there. Hear that. There are two things you need to know about simple Christian obedience. First of all you need to know that it does not earn your salvation. Jesus earned your salvation and you receive it as a gift of grace from his nail pierced hands. Nobody earns their salvation. Second you need to know that simple obedience does not earn you special reward.

² I am aware that 1 Corinthians predates the Gospel of Luke. Nevertheless scholars assume that there were collections of sayings and teachings circulating in the early church before they were formally arranged into Gospels. Luke may have begun compiling his sources while travelling with the Apostle Paul, perhaps under his direction.

You obey as an expression of gratitude and as a gesture of worship. It is a way of saying: “Thank you God for saving me. Your ways are right and your laws are my delight”. That’s why you obey. Paul says, that’s why I obey. I have a command from Jesus to preach. I preach because I am a servant of the Lord. There is no reward in that. My reward begins where my obligation ends. I DON’T HAVE TO PREACH FOR FREE, he says, I do that to earn reward.

Hear that. Reward begins where obligation ends. Let me put this in modern terms. This church pays me a very fair and generous salary. They are mature enough to provide support. They understand that giving me a salary does not purchase my tongue. I preach what I see in God’s Word and the day that the people who pay me start telling me what to say is the day they are no longer mature enough to have paid Gospel ministry. Everybody knows that, so we do the normal thing. However, like Paul, I understand that I don’t receive any special reward for doing what I am required to do as a servant of God and as a servant of this church. You purchase 40 hours of my Gospel labors every week. I receive no special reward from God for honoring that agreement. My reward begins at hour 41. There are an awful lot of pastors who do not seem to get that. There are way too many pastors who clock out at hour 38 according to government regulations in order to pursue a balanced lifestyle. Now listen, I have some boundaries that reflect my full range of obligations. I have an obligation to my wife and to my children. They require ministry too so I can’t stay here all day and all night and I don’t. I have some rules that I apply to myself. I will never be out more than 4 nights in a row and I will prefer to never be out more than 3 nights in a week. If I ever just don’t show up for something that you think I should be at, its probably because of that rule. If I’m out Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday night as I was this past week and if I’m going to be about Monday night as I am every week, then there is just no way I’m going out on Sunday night. That would make 5 nights in a row and I don’t do 5 nights in a row because I have competing obligations. So I set boundaries. BUT. Somewhere in the cracks between my 40 hours and my wider obligation there is an opportunity to obtain reward and in my estimation, a smart pastor is eager to seize it. I want to receive a reward. That means I will look at every margin between my various obligations as an opportunity to take hold of it. That’s how Paul thought and he made no apology for it.

Paul holds himself up as an example to the Corinthians of what it looks like to live voluntarily inside the limits of your permission and liberty. He lived with less than he deserved and he claimed fewer rights than he was entitled to, he did more than he had to because he was

concerned for the spread of the Gospel and he was concerned to accumulate reward. He commends the same to us.

Application And Conclusion:

Let me bring this in for a landing; I think what Paul is saying to us, is simply this. Christian freedom, at the end of the day, is not really about “what we are free to do”; rather its about “what we are free to do without” for the sake of the Gospel of God.

Put another way, mature Christians have no interest in the question “how far can I go until it is a sin” rather they want to ask: “how far can I reach with the Gospel if I just let go of this or that”? That’s what a grown up Christian is asking. He or she is asking God: “Are you calling on me to forego my right to marriage in order to serve as a missionary in a pioneer context?” He’s asking: “Should I work the night shift in the meat factory in order to plant a church in this unreached neighborhood?” Those are way better questions right? And its not only full time Gospel workers that are asking better questions, its everybody. A Christian who understands what Paul is saying here might start asking: “Would it be better for me as a youth sponsor if I gave up drinking alcohol so as not to confuse the kids?” Or “would it be better for me as a college student not to go to the bar in case I confuse or complicate my testimony”? Or, as a Christian man or woman “should I turn down that promotion and relocation at work so that I can continue serving here in my church as a small group leader?”

Now let’s be very clear, you are under obligation to do none of those things. It is not a sin to drink alcohol. It is not a sin to go to a bar. It is not a sin to take a promotion so that you can make a better living for your family. It is not a sin to relocate to another city so that you can advance in your career. Those are all things you are entirely free to do. However, I think what Paul is saying is that real Christians - mature Christians - don’t really care about what they are free to do. They are concerned with way bigger things. And so they find themselves asking way better questions. They find themselves going the extra mile and they find themselves going without things they are 100% entitled to. They find themselves casting off all hindrances and laying aside every entanglement in hopes of Gospel harvest and in pursuit of the glory of God in Christ. Let’s pray now for grace towards that end. Let’s pray together.