

I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

XI. Paul's Example Of Restricting The Use Of His Rights

(1 Corinthians 9:1-27)

I. Introduction

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid.*
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. In 1 Corinthians 9:1-27, Paul exemplified what he had taught in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 on restricting one's rights for the spiritual welfare of others. We study this passage for our insight, application and edification:

II. Paul's Example Of Restricting The Use Of His Rights, 1 Corinthians 9:1-27.

- A. The Apostle Paul had the spiritual liberty to be financially supported by the Church, 1 Corinthians 9:1-14:
 - 1. Paul asked several rhetorical questions that expected a positive answer in 1 Corinthians 9:1-2 to claim that he was free as an apostle in having seen the Lord and that his listeners were his workmanship in the discipling process in the Lord as evidence of his apostleship. (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 522)
 - 2. Paul thus had the right to eat and drink at the expense of the church (1 Cor. 9:3-4; *Ibid.*, p. 523).
 - 3. He also had the right to take a believing wife like the other apostles and the half brothers of Jesus and Peter and still thus be supported as a married couple by the church (1 Corinthians 9:5-6; *Ibid.*)
 - 4. To illustrate this point, Paul alluded to a soldier who goes to war at the expense of the nation's people whom he defends, that one who plants a vineyard has the right to eat of its fruit and he who shepherds a flock has the right to partake of the milk of the flock, 1 Corinthians 9:7.
 - 5. Even the Mosaic Law provided evidence of this principle, for Deuteronomy 25:4 directed that Israel's people were not to muzzle an ox when it was threshing out the grain on a threshing floor that the ox might be able to partake of whatever he desired to eat of the grain while threshing it, 1 Corinthians 9:8-9. This command was given for our sakes in the Church era that we might understand that he who ministers God's Word for God's people has the right to receive a livelihood remuneration from God's people, v. 10-11.
 - 6. Paul briefly noted that though he had the right to receive such livelihood remuneration, he had chosen not to receive it lest he should hinder the spread of the Gospel by appearing to "sell" the Gospel for money, thus misrepresenting the grace of God's gift of eternal life that was presented in the Gospel, 1 Cor. 9:12.
 - 7. However, Paul added that just as the priests who ministered in the temple partook of the offerings they were offering on behalf of the people, God had ordained that those who preached the Gospel should materially live off of the financial offerings of those who heard them proclaim it, 1 Corinthians 9:13-14.
- B. However, Paul restricted the use of his right to receive financial support from his listeners that he might more effectively reach other people with the Gospel of Christ, 1 Corinthians 9:15-27:
 - 1. Paul added that he had used none of these rights, nor was he writing about these rights in order to elicit offerings from his readers for his ministry, for Paul added that it would be better for him to die than to have no ground for boasting in this regard, 1 Corinthians 9:15-16.
 - 2. As an apostle, he was required by God to preach the Gospel, and if he did so willingly, God would reward him, but if he did not do so willingly, he still had a duty before God to preach the Gospel, 1 Cor. 9:17.
 - 3. Paul's immediate reward was not to use his right to receive remuneration that he might make the preaching of the Gospel clearly of no charge lest his hearers think the Gospel implied the work of supporting him, thus countering the grace of God in the Gospel itself, 1 Corinthians 9:18. In this way, he could reach a wider audience since he lived a life that itself exemplified the grace of God in Christ, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.
 - 4. Paul thus sternly restricted himself from using his right to receive remuneration lest he himself become useless to God in misrepresenting the Gospel of grace, and that for God's eternal reward, 1 Cor. 9:24-27.

Lesson: *Having taught his readers to restrict the use of their liberty to eat meat offered to idols in order to guard the consciences of weaker believers, Paul exemplified how he as an apostle who had the right to accept the Church's financial support refused to receive it that he might better present God's grace in the Gospel for God's reward.*

Application: *May we be willing to restrict the use of our liberties in Christ as needed better to edify other people.*