

Wisdom & Power



the message of 1 Corinthians

part 3

1 Corinthians 9



Personal Preparation Day 1 – 1 Corinthians 9:1-12

Paul has just finished his first discussion on food being sacrificed to idols with this declaration:

“...if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

Now... let’s see how Paul has taken this message of making sacrifices for a brother, and applied it to his own circumstances. More than that – this section forms part of Paul’s continued defence for his behaviour (v.3).

Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-12

There’s a lot of rhetorical questions, aren’t there? One after the other isn’t there? Is there a need for rhetorical questions? Is there too many in the opening of this bible study?

Well, it’s easier to work through them in three sections related to:

- Argument from apostleship (verses 1-2)
- Argument from reason (verses 4-7)
- Argument from the Lord & Scripture (verses 8-12)

For each, what are the questions Paul asks, and what answer does he expect? Write a summary of his points.

Argument 1: From Apostleship (verses 1-2)

| Question | Expected Answer |
|----------|-----------------|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |

Summary of his point from verses 1-2:

Argument 2: From Reason (verses 4-7)

| Question | Expected Answer |
|----------|-----------------|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |
| 6. | |

Summary of his point from verses 4-7:

Argument 3: From the Lord & Scripture (verses 8-12)

| Question | Expected Answer |
|----------|-----------------|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |
| 6. | |

Summary of his point from verses 8-12:

You'll notice in verses 4-6 that the word "right" appears (only in verses 4-5 in NIV). This word is used 10 times in 1 Corinthians¹ – 6 of which appear in this chapter. "Right" means - to have rights, freedom of choice, freedom of action or the power to evaluate. Back in 1 Cor 8:9, we particularly see the freedom of choice and action meanings used where Paul encourages people to put aside their "rights" for the good of others.

4. In the second half of verse 12, what is Paul's reason for foregoing his rights and freedom to act while with the Corinthians?

THINK: How do you know when it's selfish to exercise your own rights, and when it's sensible?

Personal Preparation Day 2 – 1 Corinthians 9:12-18

In the previous section of this chapter, it seemed as if Paul was angling for a pay-rise – or at least some back-pay! But as we read on, we see that's not quite what he is saying.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:12-18

1. What precedent does Paul refer to for paying God's workers, in verse 13? (See Deuteronomy 18:1-8 for the Old Testament version for Levites & Priests.)

2. From verse 14, what equivalent does Paul draw for God's worker 'post-Jesus'? (See Matthew 10:10 & Luke 10:7 for the words of Jesus that Paul is recalling here.)

3. Yet, what position does Paul take in regard to himself? (verse 15)

4. What view does Paul have of money, and of his own preaching of the Gospel? (verses 16-18)

5. What is Paul's reward? (verse 18)

THINK: Is Paul's attitude to money a model for all those who are engaged in ministry? Why or why not?

¹ 1 Cor 7:37; 8:9; 9:4; 9:5; 9:6; 9:12; 9:18; 11:10; 15:24

Personal Preparation Day 3 – 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

Paul began this chapter by stating that he was free (9:1). Free for what? We'll see in this section that Paul uses his freedom for two purposes.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

1. What is the first way in which Paul uses his freedom, in verses 19-22?

2. What is the second way in which Paul uses his freedom, in verses 23-27?

3. Paul likens the Christian life to a race (verse 24). From verse 25, what is the purpose of running the race?

4. How does this imagery translate into real life (verses 26 & 27)?

5. The second way in which Paul exercises his freedom is focussed upon himself – “that he would not be disqualified from the prize”. What is it that keeps this focus from becoming self-centred?

THINK: What might it look like to run the Christian race simply for the sake of running, and not for attaining the prize? Are you in danger of that?

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| <p>Coming Up...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food for Thought, 29 May - Working Bee, 31 May | <p>For Prayer...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eatons Hill Open Church this Sunday - That we might be willing as a church to give up the unimportant, so that people might hear the important. |
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Group Discussion Questions

Freedom is something we take for granted in Australia. It's not seen as selfish to exercise your freedom in whichever way you choose – it's seen as being your right.

1. How would you describe the relationship between your rights and the rights of someone else? As a society, how do we deal with the situation in which different people's rights are in conflict?

We saw way back in 1 Cor 1:10, that the freedom the Corinthians have should be exercised in order to promote unity.² And we have just seen in chapter 8, Paul calling on the Corinthians to forego their rights for the sake of those around them. Now let's take a look how Paul himself has exercised his own freedom.

Read 1 Corinthians 9

2. What questions, comments or observations did you have from reading the passage this week?
3. In the first 12 verses, what three reasons does Paul give as to why he could have claimed compensation from the Corinthians? What is his reason for foregoing this right?
4. From your reading of this passage, is this just Paul's own rule for himself, or part of a pattern for those in full-time ministry, or a pattern for all Christians? Why? (Try to justify from the passage!)
5. From verse 18, how does Paul balance what is due to him together with the message of the Gospel?
6. Freedom and slavery seem like opposites - but Paul applies both of them to himself, in verses 19-23. What does Christian freedom look like for Paul, from these verses?
7. How does Paul see a running race as similar to living the Christian life? (verses 24-27)
8. Paul gives two reasons here for the way in which he conducts his life. Firstly, so that people might be saved (verses 19 & 22), and secondly, that he might share in the prize at the end (verses 23 & 27). How do these two reasons fit together in the Christian life?

THINK (maybe just pick two depending on time):

- a. Paul's example was to forego what was his by rights, so that there might be nothing between people and the gospel. Common places for people to gather and socialise these days are the local bowling club, RSL or Leagues Club. If we want to remove all barriers between people and the gospel, why do we not (or why can we not) meet for church down at the local club?
- b. What is the relationship between our own Christian life, and others' understanding of the Gospel?
- c. How can we use our freedom as individuals, and as a church, so that by all possible means we might save some?
- d. Is it possible to run the race for the sake of being seen to run the race, and not for the sake of getting the prize? What might this look like?

(See previous page for prayer points and what's coming up)

² "I appeal to you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Cor 1:10)