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1 Cor. 9

Heat makes all things expand. And the warmth of love will always expand a person's heart.

(Chrysostom)

What we don't get when we read a chapter or paragraph by itself is how it relates to the entire letter in context. Chapter 8 and 9 are closely related and actually connected to the same theme. Paul just answered their question regarding meat sacrificed to idols and the temple feasts that they ask if they should participate in.

Paul seems to have been known to eat with pagans as well as Jews. This caused the Corinthians to question his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ. How could he preach and teach them with the authority of God and partake in these questionable meal situations. Basically, they were questioning Paul's authority as a real apostle. Paul deals with this issue as he does with each of their questions in this part of the letter.

Paul has a bottom line answer to each of their questions as we will see, and the answer is always absolute, but he doesn't jump right to the absolute answer. He first describes the situation and the possibilities. Then he builds his defense for the answer he is about to deliver. Then he finally answers absolutely, which is always the negative answer to their questions.

So he begins by defending his apostleship, which the Corinthians have obviously questioned based on certain behaviors of Paul. He just didn't fit the behavior mold that they had created and used to judge his authority. How could he instruct them "in the Lord" if he were not a true apostle himself. So he begins a vehement retort to their letter.

1 Cor. 9:1-2 - Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn't it because of my work that you belong to the Lord? ² Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you. You yourselves are proof that I am the Lord's apostle.

Paul's initial response to this question helps him define to them what an apostle really is. They were judging apostleship on their own criteria, but they were wrong. He claims to have freedom regarding what he eats and drinks as he ministers to various cultural people in his path. Paul claims to have seen the Lord Jesus with his own eyes – the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. He claims that if nothing else, his work in establishing the church at Corinth and their conversion should speak for itself. If he was not "in the Lord," not an apostle, then they were not "in the Lord" – in the Kingdom.

Look at this in the NIV ... ***“... Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? 2 Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”*** 1 Cor. 9:1b-2 (NIV)

Some claim to this day that one must see the Lord with their own eyes in order to be an apostle. Well that would end apostleship with Paul – and his viewing was post resurrection. What about Barnabas, Silas, and others who are called apostles and never saw or walked with Jesus? More so, the qualification of an apostle is the calling by God directly to evangelize and start new churches in remote areas. Certainly Paul and Barnabas and Silas and Timothy, etc. did this regularly, and so do many today. Yes – we still have apostles among us doing the called work of God and planting churches where none previously exist.

Paul is always concerned and conscious of speaking the truth in love, rather than making his point up front. Love to Paul is paramount.

What does it look like? It has hands to help others, feet to hasten to the poor and needy, eyes to see misery and want, ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like. (Augustine)

From here Paul moves on to defend his actions about working for a living. He was a tent-maker by trade and kept at that profession so not to burden the churches in providing for him. They mistook this as a proof that he was not a true apostle. All preachers, philosophers, etc. made their living by speaking in various places for a fee. Listen to Paul’s defense regarding this...

Paul was a bi-vocational apostle... I can relate 😊 So the people of Corinth were questioning his apostleship because he was not accepting financial assistance, so he must not be a real apostle since this was his right as a minister of the Gospel.

1 Cor. 9:3-18 (NLT)

³ This is my answer to those who question my authority. ⁴ Don’t we have the right to live in your homes and share your meals? ⁵ Don’t we have the right to bring a believing wife with us as the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers do, and as Peter does? ⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves?

⁷ What soldier has to pay his own expenses? What farmer plants a vineyard and doesn’t have the right to eat some of its fruit? What shepherd cares for a flock of sheep and isn’t allowed to drink some of the milk? ⁸ Am I expressing merely a human opinion, or does the law say the same thing? ⁹ For the law of Moses says, “You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.” Was God thinking only about oxen when he said this? ¹⁰ Wasn’t he actually speaking to us? Yes, it was written for us, so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest.

¹¹ Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren't we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink? ¹² If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ.

¹³ Don't you realize that those who work in the temple get their meals from the offerings brought to the temple? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings. ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it. ¹⁵ Yet I have never used any of these rights. And I am not writing this to suggest that I want to start now. In fact, I would rather die than lose my right to boast about preaching without charge. ¹⁶ Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News!

¹⁷ If I were doing this on my own initiative, I would deserve payment. But I have no choice, for God has given me this sacred trust. ¹⁸ What then is my pay? It is the opportunity to preach the Good News without charging anyone. That's why I never demand my rights when I preach the Good News.

Paul had the right to payment from the church to support him in the ministry. He chose not to demand that right. This caused turmoil in the congregation, so they question this in their letter to him. As we read Paul's response we can see his motivation. This had nothing to do with him not being a true apostle, but rather a conscious decision on his part to work for his own needs rather than be a financial burden on the church he started and loved. His motivation was pure love and had nothing to do with his rights. They took it the wrong way and called him to account. Here he is helping them out and they use it against him. Isn't that the way people are sometimes. We can find the smallest details to make large arguments about.

This trend has not changed even in our modern times. I do think they are getting better, but not totally gone yet. I am not called to be an apostle – for sure. However, I am called by God to be a pastor – and more so, to be a pastor here in this local body in Patchogue. When I was studying for ordination, the mindset of the district and denomination was just starting to change regarding people called to ministry, but not full time – take a church – ministry. Assistant and Associate pastors were almost second class ministers. I did not feel called to full time ministry, but to remain bi-vocational and support myself. Good thing, since our church could not support me anyway. That would force me out of ministry or out of our church.

My decision allowed me to fulfill my call from God while not putting a burden on the church finances. Do I have a right to be sustained by the church as a minister of the church – YES! However, this is not what I choose to demand. I am not less of a pastor nor do I work less as a pastor because I have a full time secular job. I have two full time jobs and get paid well for one of them. I am not saying this to ask for your confirmation of my ministry – God gives me that constantly. I am just trying to draw a connection to Paul's situation and the Corinthian church.

Pastor John is in the same boat. He works tirelessly in and for this church and this congregation with no compensation from the church. Actually, I get a little stipend, but John gets nothing. It doesn't hinder his motivation, because we are called by God to do what we do, and woe to us if we didn't obey His call to ministry.

There are some in our own church who probably didn't and don't and may never consider us real pastors, because we are not full time ministers. I am not as nice as Paul, so I won't say what I think of that mind set. ☺

Could Paul have exercised his right to financial support? Absolutely! Why didn't he then? He was more concerned about the church than himself. Love is always self-sacrificing.

L – Listening when another is speaking (acrostic)

O – Overlooking petty faults and forgiving all failures

V – Valuing other people for who they are

E – Expressing love in a practical way (Denis Waitley, *Seeds of Greatness*)

1 Cor. 9:19-23 - Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized—whoever. I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn't just want to talk about it; I wanted to be in on it!

(The Message)

Eugene Peterson says this in regard to this chapter... *"You would think that by immersing ourselves in the Scriptures, discovering God in Christ, realizing that we are saved by grace, and living under God's mercy, we would be considerate, courteous, understanding, friendly, energetic, grateful, and motivated. But it isn't so. It wasn't so in the early church, it wasn't so in Corinth, and it isn't so in your church or mine. The church will always have critics in the pews. And even though they may need to be answered, they don't need to be endlessly answered."*

Paul fully understands his freedom in Christ, even if the church writing to him does not. He is willing to be all things to all people and engage them in their cultural environment in order to win them to Christ. However, he makes it perfectly clear that he will do so only under the confines of what Christ will allow. He is not going to engage in blatant sin just because the culture of those he is ministering to indulge in that type of behavior. However, Paul is tolerant of their culture in a way to gain their trust in bringing them the Gospel.

He mentions those who are “weak” and states he became like them. In other words, he didn’t exercise his freedom in Christ in their presence, because that would cause them to stumble and reject the Gospel. Paul was motivated by pure love to win these and everyone to Jesus Christ. There was nothing more compelling to him than leading souls to Jesus. Do you have that fervor? Is preaching the Gospel paramount in your life and ministry? Is your whole life built around leading people to the Lord? Is that your burning compassion?

If so, your actions will be motivated by that kind of passion and love for souls. Paul’s was. They criticized him, but it remains true that he burned within and was willing to give up his rights in the name of Love for people and for the Lord. What about you?

So he concludes his argument with this paragraph...

1 Cor. 9:24-27 - *You’ve all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You’re after one that’s gold eternally.*

I don’t know about you, but I’m running hard for the finish line. I’m giving it everything I’ve got. No sloppy living for me! I’m staying alert and in top condition. I’m not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself. (The Message)

As an illustration, Paul moves to this athlete motif. This is something the Corinthians can definitely relate to. Every two years, the Corinthians sponsored the Isthmus games. To conclude, Paul compares the Christian life to these Isthmus games. This is a competition. We should be in this race to win. None of us should be biding our time in this Christian walk just waiting for the Lord to return or to die and gain our reward. We should be diligent in spreading the Gospel of the good news of Jesus Christ everywhere we are and go. Out of LOVE!

Stay FERVENT in Love. Fervent is a word that speaks of intensity and determination. It is an athletic term for stretching to reach the tape. Have you watched the fellows and gals who run the dash? When they come around that last turn and they’re pressing for the tape, they’ll get right to the end and then they’ll lunge forward. I’ve even seen them fall right there on the track, because they’re pushing to reach the tape ahead of the one they’re competing against. It’s the idea of intensity at the tape, stretching yourself. Those who do the long jump leap into the air and throw their feet forward and they, with intensity, stretch every muscle of their body to reach as far as they can. The same with the high jumpers, or with the pole vaulters. They stretch to the uttermost to reach the limit. That’s the word, *fervent*.

(Charles R. Swindoll – *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes*)

Paul ends with a sobering note – “I’m not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself” We all are wrestling with sin, so be diligent against it. Don’t be disqualified for the eternal prize. Stick with the program. Be self-disciplined and self-controlled. We’re in a battle from outside and within. Don’t demand your rights. Instead Love.