

2/8 First Corinthians 9-11

Chapter 9

Paul offers a personal APPROPRIATE example of Christian freedom to the Corinthians. Paul lists the numerous healthy reasons that apostles, priests, and proclaimers of the gospel should earn their living through their service to Christ and Christ's church. He draws connections between ministry and military service, farming, even the vocation of pagan temple servants, and cites support for ministers earning their livelihood through ministry from the Torah and from the examples of other apostles, including Peter and James (Jesus' brother, the leader of the church in Jerusalem). However, Paul and Barnabas both chose not to be married and not to earn their livelihoods through their ministries, and so Paul is speaking to this criticism people have of him through the lens of Christian freedom. This is an appropriate place where Christians may choose to invoke "freedom in Christ" to live a different way. Incest or eating food sacrificed to idols are not appropriate examples of things where people may choose to take a different approach. For Paul, preaching is its own reward. Paul also had the special challenge of sharing the gospel with the gentiles in a way that would remove as many barriers as possible to their hearing the message of Christ. Paul says, *"For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them."* This is similar to Luther's quote on Christian Freedom: *"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all."* By receiving no wages, Paul is free but also a slave to the gospel, to Christ, to his flock. Paul has become all things to all people, doing whatever is necessary to share the gospel in a way that they will understand. Vs. 24-27, Paul uses an illustration from the Isthmian games to explain to the people the value of self-control in Christian living. Athletes are seeking to win the crown of laurels, the same way each one of us is striving forward toward our heavenly crown. Punishing the body refers to an athlete's training and sacrifices that are made for the sake of the sport.

Chapter 10

Paul begins this chapter by reminding the Corinthians of the history of God's people through the exodus, suggesting that just as Christians participate in Christ's death and resurrection through baptism, so Jews were also baptized into the Exodus through Moses. Paul recounts the ways in which God's people went astray in the wilderness, temptations which the Corinthian church still struggles with. Paul urges humility, perseverance, and faith so that they do not fall by the same temptations as their ancestors

in the faith. Paul uses the illustration of the wilderness to remind them that *“No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”*

Paul is concerned that there are some who are worshipping idols through their participation in sacred pagan feasts (a different issue than those eating food sacrificed to idols who didn't think the idols existed). As such, he addresses this in his talk about the Lord's Supper. Sacred pagan meals mean the same thing to the pagans as the Lord's Supper means to the Christian community. Paul says that idols are not themselves gods, but rather demons and as such participating in their feasts is celebrating a kind of demonic communion. You can't worship both Christ and idols through sacrificial meals. This is commandment number 1.

Again the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols outside of the context of idol worship is raised. Paul says that you can buy meat and eat it at a non-believer's house as long as you don't ask or know that it's been sacrificed because all of the bounty of the earth is God's gift to us, but as soon as you're made aware you should refrain from it so that it doesn't damage your conscience or reputation, and most especially so that it doesn't damage the conscience of others (as per chapter 8). Whatever you do, even eating and drinking, should be done to the glory of the Lord.

Chapter 11

Vs. 1-16, Paul discusses some seemingly unimportant issues regarding worship. Traditions are the things that have been handed down, which would include the understanding that women should have their heads covered in worship. Paul draws from the creation story to draw traditional distinctions between men and women and what they should wear, but does not make distinctions between the genders on the basis of what men and women are allowed to do in worship. Vs. 10 is very strange but talks about the tiny, bizarre passage in Genesis 6 where the angels looked upon the fairness of women and had sexual relations with them and they bore the heroes of the ancient world. The “traditional” reason women were supposed to wear the veil was to protect them from the lustful eyes of the angels. However, in verse 11 Paul says that “in the Lord” women and men are both bound together, smashing the traditional hierarchy, for all things (all people) come from God. Therefore, it is up to the Corinthians to judge for

themselves what is appropriate for both men and women to wear. If a woman wants to throw off the veil, that's ok because God has provided the woman with hair as a covering.

Vs. 17-34, Now Paul reprimands the Corinthian church for its abuse of the Lord's Supper. Not only are there factions among the people, but the socio-economic divisions are causing divisions in the worship of the Lord. Communion was celebrated around an actual meal in this time, usually on Sunday evening. And in Corinth the wealthy were starting the "party" of worship before the poor and slave classes had even finished work for the day. Some arrive to worship after all of the bread and wine have already been consumed, while those who have been there for hours are drunk. Paul reminds the church of why they are coming together in the first place, to consume Christ's own body and blood, to remember him, and to proclaim his death until he comes again. We eat and drink remembering the past (Christ's death), rooted in the present together as Church (Christ's risen body), and looking toward the future (Christ's return.) Paul urges Christians to partake of the Lord's Supper in a "worthy" manner, meaning to take the Sacrament seriously and to think about what it truly means. Luther writes in his small catechism:

Who receives this sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words "for you" require all hearts to believe.