

Take-Aways for Small Group Leaders to Consider

Paul's refusal to accept payment for his services was not only because he wished to emulate the service of Christ but also because unlike the philosophers, he did not choose his vocation. Rather, his vocation chose him.

Richard Hays writes,

Despite all the impressive reasons for receiving support, including the command of the Lord, Paul will take no money because he cannot claim to be working voluntarily as an apostle. Therefore, unlike the sophists, he can receive no fees in payment for services rendered. His service is rendered to God, not willingly (!) but because he has been "entrusted with a commission." The language here suggests [...] the image of the slave as a steward (Hays: 152-3).

An important historical backdrop of the Corinthians' claims to be free to eat the food sacrificed to idols was their pride in the political and philosophical robustness of Corinth and greater Rome. Great thinkers and leaders from Cicero to Julius Caesar of Rome's past had gloried in their superiority to other surrounding states because through their worldly wisdom, they had discovered "true freedom." This secret wisdom justified the Roman state in conquering surrounding nations so that they could share their freedom with them!

The Christian Corinthians thought that their freedom to eat sacrificed meat was akin to the Roman's idea of freedom. The Corinthian Christians "knew" the meat sacrificed to idols was free to eat even though countless other Christians were "unenlightened" as they were still living under Jewish law. This pride and error was precisely what Paul sought to stop (Wright: 114).

Becoming all things to all men and women is a call of the Christian gospel. Hays writes,

[...Paul] has made himself—a freeman—into "a slave to all" (v. 19; cf. 2 Cor. 4:5). Notice that this is exactly what Paul had said happens to free persons when they are called: they become "slaves of Christ" (7:22b). Paul's slavery to Christ is expressed in the form of submitting himself in various ways to the cultural structures and limitations of the people he hopes to reach with the gospel (Hays 153).

SUMMARY AND REVIEW

Take 5 minutes to discuss last week's sermon.

INTRO TO THE TEXT:

This chapter seems disconnected from the previous chapters. In chapter 8, Paul warned the Corinthians not to eat at the "barbeque" (to use Pastor Jim's description) that was sacrificed to idols for it might pose as a stumbling block. The Corinthian Christians thought that they themselves were so mature that they could eat meat if it suited their fancy. After all, the idols were not real deities. Paul rebukes their pride. They are not to eat the meat if it causes their fellow Christians to stumble. In chapter 9, Paul furthers his rebuke by indicating that he himself is free to do all sorts of things but has refrained from doing them since they too might be stumbling blocks to others.

READ 1 Corinthians 9:1-27

ANALYZE THE TEXT

1. Why does Paul refuse payment for his services in 9:12?
2. In 9:19-23, Paul says that he has become many things to many kinds of people. What does this mean? Is Paul claiming to be two-faced and fundamentally change his message so his audience accepts him?
3. What does Paul compare the sharing of the message of Christ to in vv. 9:24-27?

A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER:

The vocations of the Jewish priesthood and the Greek philosopher were in the backdrop when Paul denies taking wages for his work as an apostle. On the one hand, a priest received the offerings from the people. According to Levitical law, the priest kept for personal use a significant portion of the animal given by the worshipper. At Paul's time, priests were notorious for abusing their privileges by eating an extreme amount of meat, indicating their greediness. On the other hand, Greek philosophers (especially Sophists and patron intellectuals) were notorious for over-charging their students and patron families. They might even artificially extend their teachings in order to justify further charges. Paul wished to distance himself from both vocations. Rather than use the gospel for personal gain he wished to show the self-

sacrificial character of Jesus Christ through his vocation.

When Paul claims that he has become many things to many people, he is not suggesting hypocrisy. It is not as if Paul accepts the creeds of one religion when talking to one audience and other creeds when talking to another audience. Rather, Paul is again imitating Christ by accommodating himself to his hearers. *Christ accommodated himself in order that the world could understand him: he became incarnate and spoke in human terms and images so the world would learn of the good news.* Likewise, Paul appeals to the cultural backdrop of his audience and applies the gospel to their worldview in a way which they can understand.

Paul's athletic imagery at the end of the chapter is startling. According to this passage, living and proclaiming the Christian life is a difficult and strenuous task. *Far be it from Christians to say that the Christian life is easy and full of worldly comfort.* Like an athlete training for game-day, the Christian must put her body and mind under strict discipline to strengthen her virtue and overall personal health. There is no use in getting into the game of life and "hoping it will work out." *The Christian must be intentional and train in order to win.*

APPLY

1. What areas in your life are you free to participate in but have refrained lest it become a stumbling block to others? Is there an area that perhaps you need to refrain from for a similar reason?
2. How might you become a "Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks?"
(To get you thinking... Do you have skeptics in your life that would like evidence for why you believe in Christ? Give them evidence through apologetics! Do you have lonely neighbors? Give them the loving community of your small group! Do you have family in material need? Give them clothes and food!)
3. Have you been slacking on your training? Where can you burn some spiritual flab in order to get ready for game day?

Suggestions for further reading: Richard Hays, *Interpretation: First Corinthians*; William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*; N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*.