

THE CHRISTIAN'S RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

1 Corinthians 9

Introduction:

In 1982, by an act of the British Parliament, with the consent of the Canadian Parliament, the constitution of Canada was officially patriated. Included in that constitution was the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. At the risk of sounding too political, let me just say that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has become a political and judicial nightmare. The Canadian Encyclopaedia says this about it:

"... the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights of individuals by enshrining those rights, and certain limits on them, in the highest law of the land. Since its enactment in 1982, the Charter has created a social and legal revolution in Canada, expanding the rights of minorities, transforming the nature of criminal investigations and prosecutions, and subjecting the will of Parliament and the legislatures to judicial scrutiny—an ongoing source of controversy."

I am not planning to talk about at length this morning about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but I felt that it was a fair introduction to the text we are looking into today. After all, everyone seems to be concerned with their rights. You can't turn on the news these days, without hearing about some person or some group of people demanding their rights and often using the Charter and the judicial system to try to gain those rights, often at the expense of the rights of some other person or group.

Along with that is the expectation of freedom – religious freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, etc. Again, we see individuals and groups demanding their freedom to do whatever they want to do.

Well, last week we looked at 1 Cor. 8, where Paul began a discussion about our freedom in Christ. He was responding to a question from the church in Corinth regarding their freedom to eat meat offered to idols, or even to participate in the meals at the temples dedicated to pagan

gods. They were wondering if it was okay as a Christian to participate in such things.

You see, there was some disagreement over that. Some of the stronger Corinthian believers said, "What difference does it make? After all, we know that an idol is nothing. What you eat can't defile you. In fact, Jesus said that it isn't what goes into you that defiles a person, it's what comes out of your heart that defiles you. So go ahead and eat. It's good meat, enjoy it." But some other young, weaker believers, who had come out of idol worship found it difficult and were offended when they saw Christians eating that meat because to them it represented a distasteful way of life that they had rejected.

So, Paul gives us a principle. Just because something is okay to do—it's not sinful or forbidden by God—doesn't mean you should do it. There is a place and a time to restrict or limit your freedom so that you do not offend a fellow believer or cause a weaker Christian to stumble in his walk with the Lord.

That is the basic premise of Paul's argument in chapter 8. Now, he goes on to give us an illustration of this. He uses his own life as an example of surrendering his rights in order to serve others and to not hinder the gospel of Christ.

This morning we are going to look for the next few minutes at the first 18 verses of this chapter. In verses 1-14 Paul lays out some of the rights and the liberties that he knows are His in Christ. Yet, at the same time, he points out his willingness to forgo those freedoms. In verses 15-18 he gives some reasons why he is willing to give up his rights in order to better serve his Master.

Paul's Defense of His Rights

Read verses 1-2 – I do not believe that Paul is here defending his apostleship. These are rhetorical questions which all have the obvious answer, "yes." The Corinthian Christians are the evidence of his authority as an apostle appointed by God to preach the gospel.

In verses 3-6 he goes on to ask some more rhetorical questions about his rights as an apostle – *read them*. You can almost hear a hint of

sarcasm in his questions. He has obviously faced some criticism from his opponents regarding his ministry. It is clear that some were accusing him of preaching the gospel for the sake of finances. There were those who insisted that he was fleecing the people to line his own pockets.

The following verses are not easy for me to speak about. John MacArthur, when he preached on this passage, entitled the message, *“Supporting the Man of God.”* The subtitle was, *“6 Reasons to Pay the Preacher.”* I am not going to go through his six reasons, but we are going to look briefly at what he says here.

Paul makes it very clear that as a minister of the gospel he has a right to be supported. There is a principle involved here regarding support of those who bring a person benefit in ministry. In verse 7 he gives three examples from three different occupations – *read it*.

A soldier is a good example of someone who does not work at a craft or trade yet is supported for his service to his country. The man who cares for a vineyard or tends a flock reaps some reward for his efforts. His point is that the one who ministers to the flock of God should also reap the reward for his labours.

In the following verses he goes on to say that these statements are not made just on human authority, but there is even a principle in the Law of Moses. He quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4 where Moses says, *“You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.”*

So, his question is: was God’s concern for the oxen? Well, when it was first written, it was. Certainly, God was concerned for the welfare of animals. He does not wish to see any animal abused, mistreated or neglected. But, Paul says, there is a greater principle involved here. God is just as concerned that those who serve be rewarded for their service, just as those who work the fields and harvest the crops expect to share in the results.

Verse 11-12a – Is it not natural that we should reap the reward of our spiritual service to you? Paul is asking, is it not right to expect that you would support us because of our service to you? Others who come to you expect you to support them, Should we not expect and receive the same?

Nevertheless (NIV – On the contrary), Paul says that they did not demand that right because they did not want to hinder the spread or the effectiveness of the gospel of Christ. This, in spite of the fact that even in spiritual things this is a normal and accepted thing.

Verse 13 – *read it*. Paul refers back to the sacrificial system in the tabernacle and later the temple. The priests—those who served in the temple—were supported by the offerings of the people. They ate the meat, they shared in the sacrifices. The contributions of the people supplied their day-to-day material needs.

Verse 14 is Paul’s summary statement, as he clearly enunciates the principle – *read it*. His conclusion is that, as an apostle and a minister of the gospel, he has the right to be paid by the Corinthian church for his ministry to them.

But ... (v. 15) – there is that word again. Beginning in v. 15, Paul explains his willingness to forgo his rights for the sake of the gospel. In vv. 15-18 we see...

Paul’s Surrender of His Rights

Read vv. 15-18 – That may all sound a bit confusing as Paul talks about preaching the gospel, his ground or basis for boasting, and his reward. However, I don’t think it is that difficult and I will try to sort it out and hopefully it will make some sense.

First, let me address the word *“boasting.”* I am certain that Paul is not thinking about bragging blowing his own horn in the way that we often think of boasting. A Greek-English dictionary defines the word as *“that of which one glories or can glory, matter or ground of glorying.”* It has the idea of something one can lay claim to and rejoice in.

So, what is Paul saying here?

- First, he is very clear that all of his talk about his rights as an apostle and minister of the gospel is not about claiming those rights. He had never demanded compensation for his ministry and was not looking for such – verse 15
- Second, his basis for boasting, that is, what he can lay claim to and glory in, is not his preaching of the gospel. His preaching is because

he is compelled to do so. He makes a very telling statement, *“Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.”* – verse 16

- Verse 17 - Whether willingly or otherwise, his obligation is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to anyone and everyone. He has been entrusted with a stewardship – see 1 Cor. 4.
- His reward – verse 18. Paul was determined that nothing, including his right to be supported by those he served, should hinder the cause of the gospel. He was willing to forgo his rights so that those to whom he preached would not be under obligation or have a reason to accuse him of anything.

Conclusion

So, how does all of this fit with Paul’s overarching argument in these chapters. We began last week by looking at chapter 8 – Paul’s response to a question by the Corinthians about food offered to idols. I began that message with a quote from Martin Luther, in which he made two seemingly contradictory statements:

A Christian is an utterly free man, lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is an utterly dutiful man, servant of all, subject to all.

If you look at verse 19 in our text you will see where that concept comes from – *read it*. We will look at that more next time as we look at the remainder of chapter 9. But for now, let’s try to summarize.

Paul’s argument in chapter 8 is that, although in Christ we are free, and we know that things like offering meat to idols has not changed the meat in any way, we need to be willing to restrict or limit our freedom for the sake of others who may have a weaker conscience about such matters. Just because something is legal and is not forbidden by God is not a reason that we should do it.

Now, Paul offers himself as an example, pointing out that, not only as a believer but as an apostle he has freedoms and rights which he is more than willing to surrender in order to ensure that others are not offended or hindered in their response to the gospel.

Paul says, I have rights, I have the right to be supported by you, but I have not demanded that right. My love for you superseded my liberty

and right for your support. So I willingly surrendered that right so that it would not be a hindrance.

As Christians we have rights and freedoms. We can give many reasons to defend those rights. But we can also surrender those rights for the sake of the gospel and the conscience of our fellow believers.

I would like to close with a quote from a sermon by John MacArthur, as he dealt with this passage:

“...as we live with each other, and as we love each other, and as we serve each other in the church, and as we remember the world around us, one of the things we have to do is this. We have to recognize that there are some things that aren't wrong to do in themselves; but they are offensive; and, thus, they become wrong for us; and sometimes we have to limit our liberty for love's sake; but it's a small price to pay; because I would think to myself that the joy experienced in loving my brother would be infinitely superior to the joy in exercising my liberty to the harm of my brother. Wouldn't you?”

Let’s pray.