

Blog 53

Christian rights and liberties and the implications: 1 Corinthians 9

Christian liberty, our freedom in Christ, is often not considered and misunderstood among believers. Almost one-fourth of Paul's letter to the church in Corinth is devoted to this important topic (1 Cor 6:12 to 9:27). For the believer, we should view liberty from the lens of serving others, while the unbelieving world sees liberty as autonomy i.e. the freedom to do whatever they want.

Paul uses himself to instruct believers regarding rights and liberties. **"Am I not an apostle? Am I not free ... Do we have no right to eat and drink ... [and] to take along a believing wife?"**

Paul specifically had the right to be supported by the Corinthians. **"If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel."**

However, Paul did not use such right. **"Nevertheless we have not used this right ...lest we hinder the gospel of Christ."**

Paul refused to receive support from the Corinthians because:

(1) they were carnal (1 Cor 3:1-3) and would misjudge his motives and it would hinder the gospel; and,
(2) by surrendering his **temporal** rights and liberties he would receive **eternal** rewards (1 Cor 9:17-27).

"I am under obligation (to preach the gospel. Woe is me if I do not ... but if I preach the gospel without charge ... I have a reward"

Paul made himself a slave of everyone. He restricted his rights and liberties to serve. **"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more."** He then gives specific examples. **"To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do these things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it."**

Do I engage with the nonbelieving and carnal believers to win the weak?

If **we** Christians do not want to hinder the gospel and desire **eternal rewards**, we should use our liberty in like manner.

Paul focused on **"the prize"**, **eternal reward** promised by God. He used athletics as an example. An athlete will severely discipline himself for years in order to win. Paul urges us to do the same (1 Cor 9:24).

This is significant. As Christians we have liberty to do whatever God does not forbid. Our liberty presents a fantastic opportunity for us to accrue eternal blessings, benefits and rewards by loving and serving God and others, and by living a sacrificial life of self-denial for the sake of the gospel.

Nonbelievers consider liberty as autonomy - complete independence. They do not submit their will to

God. When a person does that, he becomes a slave of his passions and sin. It seems that many would rather spend eternity in hell than to submit their will to God.

Paul sought the spiritual best interest of everyone. It was in his own eternal best interest to do so. He did this for those that loved him and for those that hated him, persecuted him and said all kinds of evil against him.

The Bible teaches that there are eternal consequences for temporal behavior, that everything we do, say and think will be judged by God and will impact our own soul for good or for bad for eternity.

“Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if [a weak brother] sees you ... [doing something that he believes is sinful, but you know is not sinful], will he not ... be emboldened to [do it also and thus violate his own conscience]? Because of your liberty shall the weak brother ... perish? When you sin against the brethren ... you sin against Christ. Therefore, if [my liberty] makes my brother stumble, I will never again ...[exercise my said liberty in the presence of such brother].” (1 Cor 8:9-13)

Paul restrained his own liberty for the sake of his own eternal self-interest. Paul believed God’s promises and lived accordingly with the hope of obtaining fantastic eternal rewards in heaven.

Application:

1. How do I view/approach my freedom in Christ? Am I disciplined?
2. Am I governing my behavior with potential rewards a consideration.
3. Am I appropriately restricting my liberties for the spiritual well-being of others (and myself)?
4. How can I discipline myself that I may win the race that God has set for me?