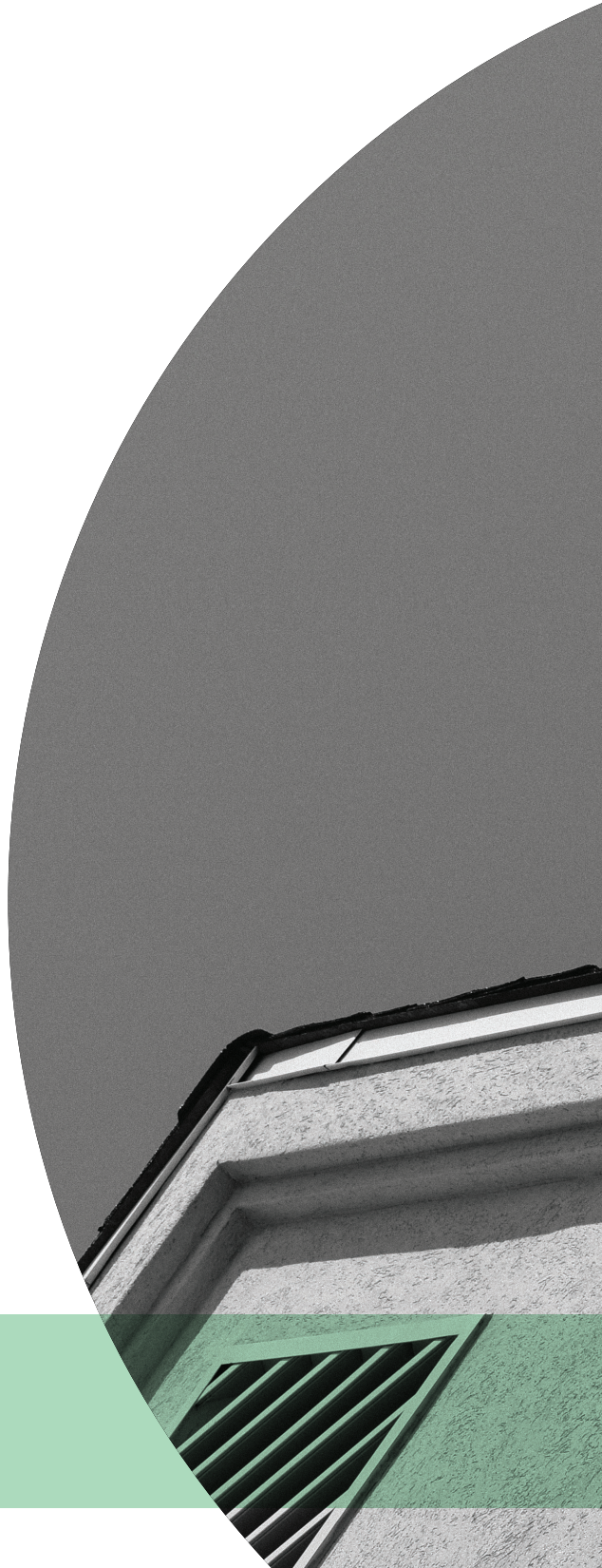


HOLINESS IN FREEDOM: THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 9:1-27



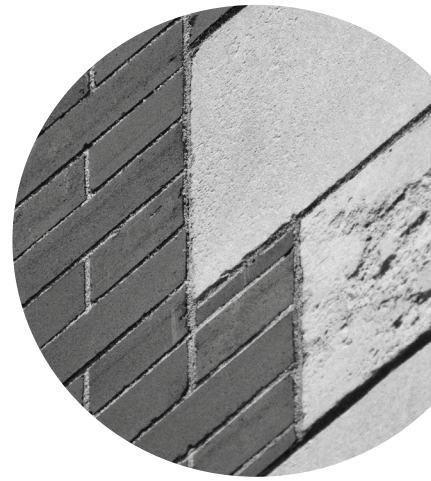
01





Daily Readings

- 01 Philippians 4:10-14
- 02 Matthew 10:5-13
- 03 Acts 9:20-30
- 04 Galatians 1:13-2:10
- 05 1 Thessalonians 2:5-9
- 06 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15
- 07 Luke 10:1-9



WEEK 01

Holiness in Freedom: The Gospel

Chapters 8-10 form a unit concerning the use of Christian freedom. In this week's study, Paul is continuing the conversation about food sacrificed to idols that began in chapter 8. Paul's primary message to the Corinthians around this controversy was to be loving and considerate of other brothers and sisters in the Lord, even if that means limiting one's own freedom.

Chapter 9 appears to present a shift to an entirely new topic, that of money and payment for pastoral leadership. In fact, Paul is using his own ministry as an example of the kind of self-limiting love he is calling the Corinthians to imitate. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Apostles (those sent by Jesus to start new churches) are typically supported financially by the church. An apostle's ministry is his job. Yet, Paul has regularly chosen not to accept payment from new churches, working his trade as a tentmaker while preaching and establishing churches.

Paul is not sharing this example randomly or to inspire praise for his self-sacrifice. It illustrates the point he was making in chapter 8—love for others should surpass love of our own freedoms and rights. What drove Paul to give up his rights was his commitment to preach the gospel of Jesus to everyone. He is willing to give up his rights, privileges, preferences, and even his national heritage for the sake of people hearing about Jesus. As we read this passage, we reflect on whether our love for Jesus and others leads us to the same kind of self-sacrifice.

PAUL'S RIGHTS AS AN APOSTLE

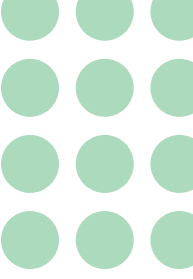
Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? ² Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

³ This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. ⁴ Don't we have the right to food and drink? ⁵ Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living?

⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? ⁸ Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ¹² If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

¹³ Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.



¹⁵ But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. ¹⁶ For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.

PAUL'S USE OF HIS FREEDOM

¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

THE NEED FOR SELF-DISCIPLINE

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

WARM UP

Have you ever won a race, tournament, or contest? Tell us about it! In what areas are you most competitive? (sports, cards, board games, etc.)

Some card games require partners or teams. Tennis can be singles or doubles matches. Do you like to “go it alone,” or would you rather have a partner when competing?

Have you ever been part of a championship team? What does it take to become a champion?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-27

Paul indicates that some in the church at Corinth were judging him. Due to his past (as Saul), he was not always warmly received by the early church. Read Acts 9:19b-30. Why were they afraid of him?

In verses 1-18, Paul addresses questions about his apostleship. In verses 1-3, what evidence does he give in defense? (Reference Galatians 1:13-2:10.)

In verses 7-12a, Paul goes to great lengths to illustrate that those who devote their lives to the preaching of the gospel are worthy of support. What illustrations does he use to prove his point?

In verses 19-23, what is Paul willing to do to reach others for Christ? Does his zeal inspire or intimidate you? Who is someone who has inspired you to run the race well?

APPLICATION

Read verses 24-27. Share at least three disciplines you could further develop as you run the race marked out for you.

Consider asking someone in your group to hold you accountable to developing these disciplines.

THINK

See "*The Race*" on the following pages.

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns you can share with your group.

THE RACE

1 “Quit! Give up! You’re beaten!”
They shout at me and plead.
“There’s just too much against you now.
This time you can’t succeed.”

And as I start to hang my head
In front of failure’s face,
My downward fall is broken by
The memory of a race.

And hope refills my weakened will
As I recall that scene:
For just the thought of that short race
Rejuvenates my being.

2 A children’s race—young boys, young men
How I remember well.
Excitement, sure! But also fear.
It wasn’t hard to tell.

They all lined up so full of hope
Each thought to win that race.
Or tie for first, or if not that,
At least take second place.

And fathers watched from off the side
Each cheering for his son.
And each boy hoped to show his dad
That he would be the one.

The whistle blew and off they went
Young hearts and hopes afire.
To win and be the hero there
Was each young boys desire.

And one boy in particular
Whose dad was in the crowd
Was running near the lead and thought:
“My dad will be so proud!”

But as they speeded down the field
Across a shallow dip,
The little boy who thought to win
Lost his step and slipped.

Trying hard to catch himself
His hands flew out to brace,
And mid the laughter of the crowd
He fell flat on his face.

So down he fell and with him hope
— He couldn’t win it now —
Embarrassed, sad, he only wished
To disappear somehow.

But as he fell his dad stood up
And showed his anxious face,
Which to the boy so clearly said:
“Get up and win the race.”

He quickly rose, no damage done,
Behind a bit, that’s all,
And ran with all his mind and might
To make up for his fall.

So anxious to restore himself
To catch up and to win
His mind went faster than his legs:
He slipped and fell again!

He wished then he had quit before
With only one disgrace.
“I’m hopeless as a runner now;
I shouldn’t try to race!”

But in the laughing crowd, he searched
And found his father’s face;
That steady look which said again:
“Get up and win the race!”

So up he jumped to try again
Ten yards behind the last
“If I’m to gain those yards,” he thought,
“I’ve got to move real fast.”

Exerting everything he had
He regained eight or ten,
But trying so hard to catch the lead
He slipped and fell again!

Defeat! He lay there silently
A tear dropped from his eye.
“There’s no sense running anymore:
Three strikes. I’m out. Why try!”

The will to rise had disappeared:
All hope had fled away;
So far behind, so error prone;
A loser all the way.

“I’ve lost. So what’s the use,” he thought
“I’ll live with my disgrace.”
But then he thought about his dad
Who soon he’d have to face.

“Get up,” an echo sounded low.
“Get up and take your place;
You were not meant for failure here.
Get up and win the race.”

“With borrowed will get up,” it said,
“You haven’t lost at all.
For winning is no more than this:
To rise each time you fall.”

So up he rose to run once more,
And with a new commit
He resolved that win or lose
At least he wouldn’t quit.

So far behind the others now,
The most he’d ever been,
Still he gave it all he had
And ran as though to win.

Three times he’d fallen, stumbling;
Three times he rose again;
Too far behind to hope to win
He still ran to the end.

They cheered the winning runner
As he crossed the line first place:
Head high, and proud, and happy;
No falling, no disgrace.

But when the fallen youngster
Crossed the line last place,
The crowd gave him the greater cheer,
For finishing the race.

And even though he came in last
With head bowed low, unproud,
You would have thought he’d won the race
To listen to the crowd.

And to his dad he sadly said,
“I didn’t do too well.”
“To me, you won.” His father said.
“You rose each time you fell.”

3 And now when things seem dark and hard
And difficult to face,
The memory of that little boy
Helps me in my race.

For all of life is like that race,
With ups and downs and all.
And all you have to do to win
Is rise each time you fall.

“Quit! Give up! You’re beaten!”
They still shout in my face.
But another voice within me says:
“GET UP AND WIN THE RACE!”