

Should a Christian eat meat that had been offered to idols? That's the question Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 8. In answering the question we learned some important principles:

--I may have the freedom to do things I will choose *not* to do in certain situations.

What would motivate me to give up a "right?"

--I must constantly think about how my actions will affect my brothers and sisters in Christ, especially the newer Christians.

--When God's Word forbids something, it is always sin (e.g. adultery, gossip, love of money, etc). But there are things God's Word doesn't forbid that may be wrong for me to do, if it violates my conscience. I may have a "weak" conscience, that is, a conscience that is triggered by a non-biblical standard (e.g. I may have learned that it's a sin to put my Bible on the floor during a worship service).

But is it? If my conscience says it is, it is. I must not do it. But I must also begin to search the Scriptures to find out if my conviction is based on Scripture or some other authority.

--When it comes to deciding what to do, I must always do what exhibits *love* for my brothers and sisters. That means I will do what's good for the body, not just myself.

That brings us to 1 Corinthians 9. Paul's going to talk to us about what to do with *our rights* when it comes to living in relationships with other people. We're going to see the following ministry guidelines modeled by Paul in chapter 9.

**We have rights.

**We must be willing to give up our rights at times.

**We must be willing to live as a slave if we want to reach lost people.

I. Paul had rights (1-12a).

A. He deserved the respect of an apostle (1-2).

Note: One of the challenges Paul faced in his ministry was critics who challenged his apostleship. Why did the critics seek to discredit him? How did he respond? Let's see...

Paul begins by asking three questions in verse 1. Look at each and think about the significance...

B. He deserved the privileges of an apostle (3-6).

1. *He had a right for the church to meet his physical needs (4).*

Q: What specific needs does he mention?

2. *He had a right to marry (5).*

He mentions Cephas (Peter) by name. We know he was married (Mk 1:30). Apparently the wives traveled with their husbands and assisted them (I know I am indebted to the hard work Sherry does "behind the scenes" to make my ministry possible!). Paul had no such assistance. Neither did Barnabas.

Q: Which meant they had to what? V 6—They had to work for a living

C. He deserved the support of an apostle (7-12a).

Paul appeals to two things to make his point...

1. Common sense says so (7).

Paul asks three rhetorical questions in v 7. They have to do with three professions: a soldier, a gardener, and a shepherd.

Q: In all three professions what is true?

2. The Scriptures say so (8-12a).

In v 9, Paul quotes from Deut 25:4...

Q: What does this OT verse say?

Q: What is Paul's point in quoting it? See verses 10-11

Key: Keep in mind the original context. In chapter 8 Paul discussed the controversy of eating meat offered to idols. There is no easy, "pat" answer to this problem. Instead, he stressed the importance of everyone in the church loving each other enough to give up rights. His point in chapter 9 is to show that what he is asking is not beyond what he himself did day after day. He will come back to the subject of meat offered to idols at the end of chapter 10.

Sometimes parents say, "Just do as I say." What's better counsel, as modeled by Paul?

II. Paul chose to give up certain rights (12b-18).

This will sound odd to our ears as Americans. We're taught from childhood to stand up for our "inalienable rights." Nothing, it would seem, is as important as our *rights*. Not so according to Paul. V 12b "But we did not use this right."

Why not? When it came to the subject of "rights," Paul knew two things...

A. He knew what his rights were (12b-14).

Q: According to v 13, what's true of those who do "religious" work, namely those who work in "temples?"

Q: What particular "right" did Paul have in mind, according to v 14?

***Those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (14).*

Paul knew he had a right to the support of those who benefited from his ministry. In fact, elsewhere he taught that local churches should support those who minister the Word and care for their souls.

See also: 1 Tim 5:18 (a quotation of Deut 25:4 and Luke 10:7)

But according to v 15, Paul refused to exercise his "right" to financial support. And he wasn't bringing this subject up to "guilt trip" the Corinthians to raise his salary, as he makes clear at the end of v 15. Here's why he declined...

B. He knew that something was more important than his rights (15-18).

***Preaching the gospel is more important than personal rights (12b, 15-16).*

Q: Why did Paul preach according to v 16?

Q: According to v 17, what did Paul say he would receive if he preached voluntarily? *A reward.*

Q: What "reward" was he interested in, according to v 18?

Do we look at our lives that way? For many of us, telling people about Jesus is just one of the many things we do in life. We work, go to ball games, take vacations, fix up our houses, spend time with our families, tend our gardens, and then once in a while, we tell someone about Jesus. Not so for Paul. Telling people about Jesus *was* his life.

Paul worked, too—but his work was merely a means to the end of opening up opportunities to preach Christ. Paul took trips—but again, these trips were determined by what? Paul enjoyed a good meal when available, but life didn't revolve around “getting the goods” for himself. His purpose in life was to fulfill God's plan by proclaiming Christ to people.

That's why Paul was willing to give up his “rights.” In fact, he knew that sometimes giving up “rights” actually opened up greater opportunities for fulfilling his real purpose in life. That's what he shares next...

To do: The same goes for us, if we'll think about it. Think of an example where the following is true. If I refuse to stand up for my “rights,” I'll actually gain an opportunity to present the gospel, whereas if I stand up for my rights, I'll probably lose that opportunity.

E.g.--

III. Paul made himself a slave to everyone (19-27).

Paul was a “free” man, as he states in v 19. Why then did he say he voluntarily became a slave to others? He had three motivations...

A. His motivation was to win people (19-22).

1. *He gave up rights to reach those under the law (20).*

Q: What kind of personal sacrifices did Paul make to win Jews? Note: He gives a clue at the end of v 20.

2. *He gave up rights to reach those who didn't have the law (21).*

Now he's talking about Gentiles. Remember Paul himself was a Jew. What kind of barriers did Paul have to cross to reach Gentiles with the gospel?

Application: Are we willing to come out of our “comfort zones” to reach lost people? One of the biggest barriers has to do with our “mindset.” How so?

3. *He gave up rights to reach the weak (22).*

The “weak” are those Paul mentioned in chapter 8, those in the church (and outside) with weak consciences, those people who are bothered by our “freedoms.” Paul chose to give up the exercise of certain freedoms at times for what purpose? Note the end of v 22...

Or to put it another way...

B. His motivation was to see the gospel advance (23).

Q: What again is the gospel?

Q: What can we do to help the gospel advance?

C. His motivation was to win a prize (24-27).

Paul was aiming for something in his life, a crown, a *prize*.
Read verses 24-25.

1. *Athletes deny themselves to get a temporary crown.*

The summer before my senior year in high school, I ran about 500 miles. I got out of bed five days a week and hit the country roads. Why? I wanted a prize. I wanted to be an all-state cross country runner. I spent hours and hours in that pursuit. And never attained it. Even if I had, the plaque would be sitting in a box, collecting dust somewhere.

2. *Paul denied himself to get an eternal crown.*

Q: What does he say about the crown at the end of v 25?

Q: What did Paul do (and what must we do) to obtain this prize?

•He disciplined his body.

This reward is not for the person who does only what he “feels like doing.” Paul says he “beat his body (27).” In addition...

•He made his body his slave.

Q: How do you make your body your slave?

Q: What was one of Paul’s greatest fears? Look at the end of v 27...

•He did not want to be disqualified for the prize.

The Christian life isn’t a 100 meter dash, but a marathon. There’s no prize for fast-starters in a marathon. The prize goes to the one who finishes well.

The KJV uses the term “castaway.” It’s from the Greek *adokimos* which means “disapproved.” As Schofield comments, “The apostle is writing of service, not of salvation.” Paul already talked about this potential loss back in 3:10-15.

He didn’t want to do anything that would prevent people from hearing the truth of Christ from his lips and life.

One thing’s for sure. You don’t finish the race well if your ambition in life is to make sure you get your “rights.”

Discuss: What are some things we can do to disqualify ourselves from finishing the race well and winning the prize?