

Freedom & Rights pt. 3

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



For the last several weeks, we have been making our way through chapter nine in 1 Corinthians. Chapter nine is the culminating chapter in a three-chapter section (7, 8, & 9) where Paul talks about Christian freedom, rights, and mission. If you remember back to chapter seven, Paul talked about marriage, specifically the freedom to choose to get married or to stay single. He considers both marriage and singleness gifts from God. They are different gifts, but both are gifts. Both have challenges and opportunities. Then in chapter eight, Paul talks about the freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols. This was a particularly tough issue in Corinth because there were many in the church who had come out of the idol-worshipping lifestyle. So Paul helps them to understand how to differentiate between the essential things, disputable things, and things that are preferences. Worshipping the one true God and not idols is essential. Going to the temple or not going was a disputable matter. And eating meat from the temple was a matter of preference. At the heart of Paul's instruction was the truth that, whether it was a disputable matter or a preference, they were never to allow their "rights" in these things to come before loving and serving one another. This brings us to the conclusion of chapter nine, where Paul reminds us that endurance is a core virtue in the Christian life. For the believer, the drive to endure comes from what we've already received. **In other words, my love for God fuels faithful love for my neighbor.**

1. Loving God & Neighbor

a. Chap. 8 – For the love of God.

- i. You cannot worship God and idols at the same time.
 1. **⁴Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one. (cf. 8:4)**
- ii. **Vertical** – Disordered desires in my relationship with God. → I.e., The displacement of God. (Idolatry – This is the displacement of God.)
 1. **What is an idol? – An idol is something that we look to for things that only God can give.¹**
 2. **"We think that idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. The greater the good, the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our**

¹ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011), 131.

deepest needs and hopes. Anything can serve as a counterfeit god, especially the very best things in life.” – Tim Keller ²

3. At the center of idolatry is the centering of self... “I am the greatest authority on my condition and redemption.” → We have heard and seen this attitude in the culture of the Corinthian church.

iii. Your love of God informs how you live your life.

1. Genuine worship is not just attendance for one hour on a Sunday morning. It is a whole-life approach
2. **Worship is** – The act of adoring and praising God, that is, ascribing worth to God as the one who deserves homage and service. The church, which is to be a worshiping community (1 Pet 2:5), expresses its worship corporately and publicly (liturgically) through prayer; through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; through the reading and exposition of Scripture; through observance of the sacraments; and through individual and corporate living in holiness and service.³

b. Chap. 9 – For the love of your neighbor.

- i. **For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.** (cf. 9:19)
- ii. **I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.** (cf. 9:23)
- iii. Brothers and Sisters – How do I love those in the body of Christ?
 1. I love them by not putting my rights in the disputable matters or in matters of preference ahead of unity and discipleship.
 2. I keep the mission and the gospel as the primary things.
 3. I resist “holy huddles” and don’t get drawn into gossip.
 4. Don’t forget what Paul said to the church in Galatia - **“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”** (Gal. 5:13-15)
- iv. Because we are a people of a great reception, we live that out in the context of community.
 1. I.e., Vertical and Horizontal restoration and righteousness.
 2. Vertical – Restoration with God.
 3. Horizontal – Restoration and righteousness with my neighbor.

c. Identity – Received, not achieved.

- i. **Love received, not love achieved, is the basis for Christian compassion and mission.**

² Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011), xix.

³ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 122.

- ii. **Achieved** – I am only as good (valuable) as my last success or my neighbor’s last failure. I.e., “At least I’m not like them.” (Luke 18:11)
 - 1. Comparison is a thief of joy.
- iii. **Received** – I am only as good as the one who created me says that I am. I.e., My core identity has nothing to do with what I have produced, earned, or accomplished. Instead, it has everything to do with what the greatest voice of esteem in my life says about me.

2. Enduring Faithfully

- a. The seriousness of the mission... Athletics – Running and Boxing.
 - i. Athletic competition in the Corinthian context.
 - ii. The **Isthmian Games** were held near **Corinth**, at the **Sanctuary of Poseidon** on the Isthmus, roughly 10 miles east of the city. They were one of the **Panhellenic Games** (alongside Olympia, Delphi, and Nemea) and were **revived after Corinth’s rebuilding by Julius Caesar in 44 BC.**⁴
 - 1. “The Isthmus belongs to Poseidon, and in his honor are celebrated the Isthmian Games...”
 - iii. Paul knew his audience well. He’s emphasizing his argument using an analogy that fits their cultural context. Corinth was the home of the Isthmian games, which, like the Olympic games, were celebrated every few years and awarded athletes for their physical prowess. He could say something like, “I really want you to pursue Christ and those around you,” but instead he says, “You know how runners are desperately trying to win their races? That’s how intensely I want you to pursue Christ and others.” (verse 24) This is his first concern: Reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- b. **The blue ocean of mission in front of us.**
 - i. 26k+ of our neighbors are not connected to a gospel believing church.
 - ii. 50% of pastors in our district will retire in the next 7 years, just as seminaries are hitting all-time low enrollments.
 - iii. 49% of Americans reported in 2025 that religion was an important part of their lives. This is a 15% drop from the same report 10 years earlier. No Western country had a greater decline in reporting than the US.⁵
 - iv. Regular church attendance is defined as 3 out of every 8 weeks. church attendance is defined 3 out of every 8 weeks.
 - 1. Are we willing to lay down our cultural and political convictions and commitments to become all things to all people, so that we might win some?
 - 2. Are we willing to step into new rhythms, practices, and structures as a church so that we can equip and release the next generation of pastor and worker?

⁴ Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.1.7–2.2.1 (2nd c. AD): Describes the **location and sanctity** of the games and attributes their founding to Sisyphus in honor of Poseidon.

⁵ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/697676/drop-religiosity-among-largest-world.aspx>

3. Are we willing to lay down our worship preferences so that we can connect with a generation that is spiritually hungry but looks for answers everywhere but the church?

c. The regular call for intentionality and faithfulness in the Christian life.

- i. Paul's concern is singular: "Run in such a way¹⁴ as to get the prize." This exhortation is the point of the entire paragraph. It first of all picks up the theme of the preceding imagery, of the runner who is intent on winning the prize. Thus he means: "Run as that one runs who wins the prize." At the same time it points forward to the succeeding imagery, which explains both what one must do in order to win the prize and what the prize itself is for which they are running.⁶
- ii. We understand the need for intentionality and endurance.
- iii. A foot race yielded but one winner. Therefore the runners must make every effort. Winning is more than simply starting in the race. The parallel with the Christian way is not complete, for many are saved, not just one winner. Paul's point is that, like the runner, the Christian must give of his best.
- iv.
 1. "If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time." - Zig Ziglar
 2. "The kingdom of heaven is not opposed to effort. It is directly opposed to earning." - Dallas Willard
 3. "Endure till the end." - Jesus to the seven churches in Revelation.

v. Don't miss the phrases that Paul uses:

1. "Run to obtain..."
2. "Exercise self-control..."
3. "Do not run aimlessly..."
4. "Discipline my body..."
5. "Do not be disqualified..."
 - a. Paul refuses to be bound by bodily desires. In picturesque language he speaks of the way he disciplines himself. Beat renders *hypōpiazō*, a verb from boxing, with the meaning 'give a black eye to'. This, coupled with make it my slave, leaves no doubt as to the vigour with which Paul subdues his body. This does not mean that he saw the body as evil. That is not a Christian position. Paul is saying emphatically that the body must be controlled. Disqualified translates *adokimos*, which means 'which has not stood the test'; it was used of disqualification in the Games. Paul's fear was not that he might lose his salvation, but that he might suffer loss through failing to satisfy his Lord (cf. 3:15).⁷

d. Our CCC value – Purposeful responsiveness.

- i. **Is not** - Meeting every possible need or doing everything.

⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 436

⁷ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 137–138.

1. **The simple truth is that no one has the capacity to meet every need that comes their way.** We have to make decisions when it comes to the reality of our finite resources.
- ii. **Is - Seeking and seizing the opportunities God provides every day.**
 1. **While we can't meet every need, we are not permitted to apathy or selfishness.** This means that we need to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us in understanding and energy to step into the opportunities that God provides every day.
- iii. **How does Paul's burden and approach show the value of purposeful responsiveness?**
 1. Paul's life demonstrated this value in the way that he willingly related to others so that they might receive the gospel.
 2. This meant that Paul had to be willing to follow God into the everyday opportunities of his life.
 3. It also meant that Paul needed to be intentional and purposeful in the way that he related to those that God put in his path.
- iv. **How am I seeking and seizing the opportunities God provides every day?**
 1. Do I operate with the mindset that God has people for me to run into every day that need to hear the good news of the gospel?
 2. Do I believe that the gospel (in clarity via words and deeds) is the most important thing (greatest need) of my neighbors, family, and children?
 3. Do I ask God's Spirit to help me to be purposefully responsive throughout my day?