

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 9:15-27

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kyllies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

Introduction: There was correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian Church about which we have no record. Apparently, in a letter which we do not have, the Corinthians had written to Paul asking him to address certain concerns. Beginning in Chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians, Paul begins to answer the questions the Corinthian Elders had addressed to him as an Apostle. Chapter 8 concerned the issue of eating food which was offered to idols. In Chapter 9, Paul first gives an example from his personal life to illustrate the principle he has given in 8:13 related to eating meat offered to idols. That principle is, "if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall." In Chapter 9, Paul gives other examples of how this principle, though related to food in Chapter 8, guides a follower of Christ in many other matters.

1 Corinthians 9:15-27

Verses 15-18

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.

- In verses 1-14, Paul has made it clear that as an Apostle he has all the rights which are due to an apostle. However, he knows that some Christians do not believe that he has the qualifications to be an Apostle. So, not to cause those who think this way trouble or to make them stumble, he does not insist of his rights as an apostle. He does not want to make them stumble.
- Even though Paul believes that the church should pay the preacher who serves it, and that he is entitled to all the rights due an apostle (1

Corinthians 9:1-14), he clearly states that he is not asking the Corinthians for a salary or any other kind of support. He does what he does free of charge, and he would not have it any other way.

- He does not preach the Gospel to prosper himself. He preaches because God has called him to preach. He could not be happy doing anything else. His reward is doing what God has called him to do. This should be the attitude of every preacher and of every Christian. All Christians should serve because God has called them to service.

Verses 19-23

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.

- Why should serving be all that matters for a Christian? “TO WIN AS MANY AS POSSIBLE” to Jesus Christ. The goal is not to prosper self or make it all about the saved. The goal is to work together to win some to Jesus.
- So, when Paul preaches to Jews, he becomes inoffensive to them in other matters, so that he might win some of them to Jesus. When he speaks to non-Jews, he tries to be inoffensive to them in other matters, so as to win some of them to Jesus. When he speaks to weaker Christians, he does not become puffed up (see 8:1-3) with his knowledge, he speaks to them in terms they can understand, seeking to win some of them.
- He does all this “for the sake of the Gospel.” He is not seeking personal advancement or standing. He does it all to win some to Jesus. There is blessing in this for him, because he is fulfilling the call of God on his life. His only goal, however, is to win some for Jesus.

Verses 24-27

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.

- Paul gives another example of how this principle works. He points to runners in a race. He says that Christians should run like they want to win the prize. They must go into strict training, denying themselves many things which are theirs by right. Things like rich food and strong drink. They do this because they want to win the crown of victory.
- The runners compete for a crown that is perishable. Christians run for the souls of others. They deny themselves many things because the race is not about them. It is about winning some to Christ. It is not about us! It is about Him!

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