

Discovering God's Wisdom

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 10

1 Corinthians 9

Searching the Scriptures

for hidden treasure

"I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure." Psalm 119:162

As you begin to read chapter 9, it looks as if Paul has entirely left the subject matter of chapter 8 behind, but, in fact, he has not. In chapter 9, Paul uses his own life and choices as an illustration of what he has set the stage for in chapter 8 and will continue with in chapter 10. Paul begins with the question, "*Am I not free?*" Paul was free indeed! This chapter will give evidence of this fact in a very real and instructive way. *We would do well to make it our aim to live in the freedom that Paul had!*

First Day: Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

1. Using the form of rhetorical questions (some 16 in all), Paul begins by making his claim to be free. What other claims does he make in verse 1?

It seems that there was a dispute among some Corinthians as to whether Paul was truly an apostle or not. Possibly it was those who were *of Apollos*, or *of Cephas* who were questioning this fact.

- a. From verses 1-2, how do the Corinthians themselves prove his apostleship?
- b. What does 2 Corinthians 3:2 say about this?

Paul is not only free, and his apostleship proven by their very salvation, but as an apostle, he has certain *rights* that he may lay claim to.

2. What rights does Paul have? (We notice that Paul includes Barnabas in his consideration as well.)
verse 4
verse 5
verse 6
3. Verses 7-14 give the reasons that Paul may lay claim to these rights, in particular the right to be paid for his ministry to them:
 - From verse 7, what was simply *common practice*?

- From verses 8-11, what was *the law* and what could be deduced from it?
- From verse 13, what was *Jewish custom*?
- From verse 14, what was *Christ's command*? (See Matthew 10:10b)

Making It Personal...

4. What are your thoughts on tithing? We know that tithing is a principle set up in Scripture, but how does today's passage help you to see the importance of sharing materially with those who have shared spiritually with you (see verse 11)?
 - a. Are there any changes you need to make in this area—either in a practical way, or maybe just an attitude adjustment? How does Malachi 3:10 encourage you in this area?

Digging Deeper

The word apostle comes from the Greek word *apostolos* which means to send. It designates the office as instituted by Christ to witness of Him before the world. It also designates the authority which those called to this office possess (from *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, Edited by Spiros Zodhiates Th.D.). The following conditions were the criteria for true apostleship. Note how Paul's experience qualified him as such:

- ❖ *Witness of the risen Christ*—see Acts 1:21-22
Paul's experience—
 Acts 9:1-9
 1 Corinthians 9:1
 1 Corinthians 15:7-8
- ❖ *Commission from Jesus Christ*—see Acts 10:39-43; Matthew 28:18-20
Paul's experience—
 Acts 9:10-16
- ❖ *Signs, wonders, and mighty acts*—see 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4
Paul's experience—
 Acts 13:9-12
- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

Pearl of Great Price

“...We endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.”
 1 Corinthians 9:12b NASB This is your memory verse—begin memorizing it today!

Second Day: Read 1 Corinthians 9:15-23

The verses we have in front of us today are proof of Paul's great love for mankind, his heart for ministry, and the reality of his personal freedom. In the first 14 verses of chapter 9, Paul gives evidence of his right to receive support from the Corinthian church. In the verses we will study today, he waives those rights...

1. Looking back to verse 12, why did Paul waive his rights for support?
 - a. What was Paul's real reason for preaching the gospel? v. 16

Verse 17 is difficult to understand. Paul did preach voluntarily and there would indeed be reward for his labor, but, whether voluntarily or not, Paul had been entrusted with a stewardship. He was a man acting under orders!

2. Is there any ministry that you, like Paul, do *of necessity*? Fill in the following blank space: "*Woe is me if I do not _____.*"

Oswald Chambers says of Paul, that once *he had realized the call of God, there was no competitor for his strength.*

- a. What *good things* are you giving your strength to? Is there any area that comes to mind that you could *limit* in order to give more to the ministry which *compels you*?
- b. What does Paul consider his *reward* for preaching? v. 18

One of the most inspiring passages of Scripture is found in verses 19-23. Paul begins this chapter with the question, "*Am I not free?*" Verse 19 answers the question—*yes, Paul is free!*

3. Although Paul is truly free, what does he willingly make himself for the sake of mankind? v. 19
 - a. The reality of Paul's freedom is clearly seen in the subsequent verses. What was Paul free to be:
 - *To the Jews?*
Why?
 - *To the Gentiles?*
Why?
 - *To the Weak*
Why?
 - *To all men?*
Why?

- b. Would Paul have gone against his own conscience in order to become all things to all men? What do you think he means in these verses?
- c. How do you see Paul's freedom and maturity in being able to adapt himself to individuals in order to bring them to Christ?

Making It Personal...

Paul wasn't legalistic. He was a mature enough Christian to be adaptable. His goal was always bringing others to Christ.

- 4. In talking to others about Jesus, are you able to adapt to them? Is there anything that you might need to *soften* in order to be a more effective witness for the gospel?

Digging Deeper

The following are examples of Paul freely adapting himself for the sake of ministry. See if you can understand how he did this from these examples. Share what you see.

- ❖ *To those under the law—*

Acts 16:1-3
Acts 18:18
Acts 21:20-26

- ❖ *To those not under the law—*

Acts 15:1-21

Paul only adapted himself when it didn't conflict with what he believed to be a matter of truth and righteousness. Because of this, he was also free to point out a compromise of truth when he witnessed it. Share from the example that follows:

- ❖ *To Peter when he was acting the hypocrite—*

Galatians 2:11-14

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

Third Day: Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Paul's thoughts now turn from personal illustration to a word of exhortation—and what a wonderful exhortation it is! We will be helped in our effort to get ahead spiritually if we can but catch the vision of these words!

- 1. What analogy does Paul use to encourage the Corinthians in their Christian effort?

Even in using this particular analogy as an exhortation to the Corinthians, Paul was adapting himself to them! They would be well acquainted with the analogy of runners running to receive a prize, as the Isthmian games (second only to the Olympics) were held every two years in Corinth. They were eyewitnesses to the training and self-denial involved as athletes readied themselves for the competition.

2. In a typical running race, how many people are able to win?
 - a. Is this true of the *Christian* race? (Consider this not as a race for *salvation*, but a race for the *rewards of faithful service*.) Still, how does Paul exhort *each* Christian to run? v. 24

3. What are some of the things a runner might do to train for the biggest race of his career? (Would he give his strength to anything else?)
 - a. What are some things the runner of the Christian race might do to *run in such a way as to win* (NASB)? (Consider any similarities to the training of an athletic runner.)

 - b. What is the difference in the prizes of these 2 runners?

4. From verse 26 (NASB best), finish these sentences with Paul's example:
"I run in such a way _____."
"I box in such a way _____."
 - a. What kind of *discipline* is Paul referring to when he says, "*I discipline my body and bring it into subjection...*"?

 - b. When Paul spoke of being *disqualified*, do you think he meant that he would lose his salvation? What might he have meant?

Making It Personal...

5. Paul says that he runs in such a way, as not without aim (NASB). Right now (today) in your everyday life, what are you aiming at? Considering your Christian "run," would you say that you are *running in such a way that you may win*? Share honestly.

Digging Deeper

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

Fourth Day:

Deeper Discoveries

This portion of the lesson will take a closer look at some of the words in the chapter. You will need to have your tools—or resources at hand: more than one Bible translation, a dictionary or Bible dictionary, concordance, atlas, and encyclopedia. (If you don't have all of these, simply use what you do have to enrich your learning.)

Using the tools you have at hand, do some digging into the following terms. Start with your dictionary (or Bible dictionary), and then look up the references to add to your understanding. If you have additional resources, you may want to keep digging (making notes in the margins). After you've completed the investigative process, write a definition in your own words. Your investigation in today's lesson will lay the groundwork for tomorrow's study, so be as thorough as you can in your research.

Obtain (9:25) *“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown...”*

Dictionary definition: _____

What does the Bible have to say? John 4:36; Mark 11:24; Galatians 3:14; James 1:12

❖ Write your own definition: _____

Disqualified (castaway) (9:27) *“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”*

Dictionary definition: _____

What does the Bible have to say? 2 Timothy 3:8; Titus 1:16; 2 Corinthians 13:5-8

❖ Write your own definition: _____

Fifth Day:

Heartsearch

Are you walking worthy of your high calling? Are you applying the wisdom of God to your daily life? Get ready for some self-discovery! This portion of the lesson will give you the opportunity to examine your heart, express your mind, and experience your lesson, by applying what you are learning to everyday circumstances.

Staying in Shape

Any athlete must train diligently and keep himself in shape, if he expects to compete to win the prize. What he cannot do is allow himself to waste time or become lazy or get sidetracked. He has to be disciplined in his training, his diet, his thought processes, and his time during each day. He must say “no” to some things that are good in order to achieve the best. That means getting up early and turning down late night invitations, as well as rich and fattening foods. Not that there is anything wrong with partaking in food or fun, but some things can become hindrances if they interfere with reaching the desired goal. They may even become harmful to the athlete over time.

Paul was willing to surrender his rights in order to have the joy of winning souls to Christ. His perspective was always: *“I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified”* (verses 26-27 NLT).

1. Considering your own *spiritual race* for a moment, which of the following most closely describes your current position in the race and why do you think so?
 - Just stepping over the starting line...
 - Running with the pack...
 - Becoming lazy in your attempts to keep up...
 - Passing the baton to the next generation...

2. What kind of prize are you expecting to win when you reach the finish line?

Discipline is often thought of in a negative context, but it is just as necessary in spiritual development as it is in physical training.

3. What kind of discipline are you exercising to stay *spiritually fit*?

4. Look up the following verses and summarize the instruction as well as the result or reward for your obedience:

Galatians 6:7-10

The instruction:

The reward:

Ephesians 6:10-20

The instruction:

The reward:

Philippians 3:12-14

The instruction:

The reward:

2 Timothy 2:1-5

The instruction:

The reward:

In 2 Corinthians 5:9, Paul sums up our motivation of the future reward: “*Therefore, we make it our aim...to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*” If you want to serve the Lord and please Him, then there is going to be a price to pay. What will help to encourage you in your efforts is to remember that you are not running for an earthly prize, but a heavenly one, and you are not running alone—He promises never to leave you!

Heartsearch: Briefly look back over your *entire lesson* before filling in the following.

❖ *Examine your heart*

What has God put His finger on through your study and brought to light in a new way? (What did you learn about yourself?)

❖ *Express your mind*

What change has this week’s study brought about in your thought process? What difference will this make in how you view your current circumstances?

❖ *Experience your lesson*

What nugget of wisdom from your lesson do you plan to apply to your life?

Sixth Day:

Laying Up Treasure

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21*

The highest calling of the believer, and the most important way to lay up treasure in heaven, is through intercessory prayer. You will want to give thoughtful consideration to what you record on this page, as it will be the basis for your prayer during group time. The format for this day of your lesson is based upon the ACTS method of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. In addition to these four, there is space provided for you to keep track of answered prayers, people and things you want to pray for in the coming week, and also a place to write out this week’s Scripture verse from memory.

Using the lesson as your focal point, write out your prayer for each of the following:

I praise God for (an aspect of His marvelous character) _____

I confess to God that I _____

I thank God for _____

I am asking God _____

Praise for answered prayer: _____

People/things I want to pray for this coming week: _____

Pearl of Great Price: _____

Notes

