

I CORINTHIANS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to I Corinthians chapter 9 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

Keep in mind that I Corinthians chapters 8 through 10 are focused on our Christian liberty and conduct.

And we saw last week in I Corinthians chapter 8 that Paul spoke of the principles of knowledge and love in regard to this Christian liberty.

Paul put it like this in I Corinthians 8:9, **“But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.”** This is the key verse in these chapters dealing with our Christian liberty!

In other words, don't let your Christian liberty hurt those who are weaker in the faith. Help them along, not to stay in the legalism that they are in, but to help them out of it!

And this evening in I Corinthians chapter 9 we will see Paul show us how these principles of knowledge and love in regard to Christian liberty are played out in his life.

We can break this chapter down like this,

I Corinthians 9:1-14 – Paul shows that he has a right to be supported by those he ministers to as an apostle.

I Corinthians 9:15-18 – Paul shows them that even though he has this Christian liberty to be supported, he refuses to exercise that right and has decided to work with his hands to supply his own needs. Why did he do that? So that he could minister freely in Corinth and other places as he brought them the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

I Corinthians 9:19-27 – Paul now explains to them that he would give up every right for the sake of winning his race for Christ and souls for the kingdom! What a heart this man had and what an example to us!

With that as our background, let's begin reading in I Corinthians chapter 9 beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

I CORINTHIANS 9

VERSES 1-2

As you read through these verses you may be thinking, “How in the world does this relate to eating meat that was sacrificed to idols? How does it relate to what Paul was talking about in the previous chapter?”

Make no mistake about it, it does flow from I Corinthians chapter 8 and this is how it flows.

Here in verse 1 we see Paul give four rhetorical questions with the response being in the affirmative or “Yes!” And what Paul is doing is he is showing them how he freely gave up his rights as an apostle, ***CORRECT KNOWLEDGE***, so that he would not cause any of them to stumble, ***LOVE!***

Let's look at these four rhetorical questions that Paul made.

“Am I not an apostle?” – This was an issue for Paul because the Judiazers would come in after Paul shared the Gospel and they would add works to the Gospel. And they would try to discredit Paul’s authority as an apostle because they didn’t like what he was saying about salvation being all about grace and not about works! And he wants them to understand that he is an apostle, not by the will of man, but by the will of God!

“Am I not free?” – In other words, “Since I am an apostle, don’t I get to enjoy the same freedom that the other apostles enjoy?” And Paul will expound on that as we read on.

“Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” – This is important because one of the qualifications for being an apostle was a personal experience in seeing the resurrected Christ. (Acts 1:21-22). And we saw in the book of Acts that Paul was a witness of Christ’s resurrection as he saw the Lord when he was traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians. (Acts 9:1-9; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-43)

“Are you not my work in the Lord?” – And, if they still doubted the right to Paul’s apostleship, the believers in Corinth were a proof of it. You see, he worked with them, they knew what he did when he was with them in Corinth for 1½ years!

And Paul expounds on them being the proof of his apostleship in I Corinthians 9:2, as he said, **“If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”**

The idea of a **“seal”** is that of certification. In other words, these believers certified that Paul was an apostle, he was authentic!

And Paul is going to defend his right to be an apostle. Remember in I Corinthians 9:1-14 Paul is showing them that he has the right to be supported by those he ministers to as an apostle.

VERSES 3-6

Paul must have felt that the Corinthian believers had placed him on trial regarding this issue of his apostleship for he uses the Greek word APOLOGIA for “**defense**” and ANAKRINO for “**examine,**” which are both legal words taken from the Roman court.

Now Paul is saying to them that as an apostle he should be supported by the church, in fact if he was married, that his wife should also be supported, cared for, be able to travel with him.

What is interesting is that the other apostles, along with their wives were supported in the ministry while the Corinthian believers did not support Paul or Barnabas and the Corinthian believers then held this against them!

They felt if they were apostles, they would be supported!

But Paul and Barnabas voluntarily refused to accept their support, the support of the Corinthian church who did not offer it in the first place!

It was almost as if the Corinthian Christians said, “If Paul and Barnabas were real apostles, we would support them; but since they are not supported, we suppose they aren’t real apostles.” So now Paul is going to show them how foolish their actions were in not supporting him.

VERSES 7-14

Paul was very good at making his point. Here Paul is illustrating the foolishness of not supporting those who are ministering to them.

And to show how foolish it is he speaks of a soldier. And the point is this, “***Does a soldier go to war by paying his own way, getting his own gear?***” Of course not!

Then he speaks of a farmer to prove his point. *“Does a farmer who works his land not eat of the fruit of his land?”* Of course not!

And then he speaks of a shepherd. *“A shepherd who cares for his flocks, does he not drink the milk of his flock?”* Of course he does!

And then his point, *“Then why do you think it is strange that you should support me?”*

Paul is saying that he has the right to be supported by those he is ministering to, those whom he is working with.

And to further drive home his point Paul goes to the Mosaic Law, not just human illustrations.

Paul quotes out of Deuteronomy 25:4 to make his point.

You see, the ox would walk on the grain to break away the husk and an animal was not to be muzzled while he worked. He should be able to partake of some of the fruit of his labors. If he was muzzled it would be not be humane to the animal.

Interestingly enough, Paul quoted that same verse when he wrote to Timothy and encouraged the church to pay for, care for their ministers. He wrote, **“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”**

Make no mistake about it, this is speaking of more than just the care of animals. It has to do with a minister who is working, that he has the right to be supported by the people he is ministering to!

Yes, some ministers abuse this principle and they fleece the flock that they are serving. Clarke made these comments regarding those who are abusing or fleecing the flock they are to serve, “If a man who does not labour takes his maintenance from the Church of God, it is not only a domestic theft but a sacrilege. He that gives up his time to this labour has a *right* to the support of himself and his family: he who takes more than is sufficient for this purpose is a covetous hireling. He who does nothing for the cause of God and religion, and yet obliges the Church to support him, and minister to his idleness, irregularities, luxury, avarice [greed], and ambition, is a *monster* for whom human language has not yet got a *name*.”

But we are not talking about greed here but supporting the needs of the minister so he can do the work of the ministry.

In verse 11 here in I Corinthians chapter 9 Paul shows us that as the minister gives out spiritual things, spiritual food to the people, they support him with material things.

What is interesting and I believe hurtful to Paul, is that the Corinthian believers supported others in the ministry, but not Paul!

And here we see the heart of Paul, in I Corinthians 9:12. You see, Paul is telling them that no matter what, being supported or not supported, he was still going to serve the Lord, preach the Gospel message, for that is what he was called to do and he was not going to let anything stop him from finishing the course that God has set for him.

And then Paul points them to the Temple priests and how they were supported, and then he points this out to them, “**Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.**” I Corinthians 9:14.

Here we see Paul's point, if he was going to deny himself in that which he deserved for the edification of the people, can't they do the same in regard to eating meat sacrificed to idols and deny themselves?

Let me share this with you in regard to how others supported Paul. As you read through Acts 16:11-17:13 you see that the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea) supported Paul in the work he was doing even though the Corinthians did not.

In II Corinthians 8:1-5 Paul tells us, **“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”**

And now Paul rests his case, as a defending attorney in a court of law you might say, by these closing statements, **“Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”** I Corinthians 9:14.

So Paul has clearly shown us that he had the right to be supported by the people as he brought to them the Gospel message. But, interestingly enough, he spends the next four verses explaining why he refuses to exercise that right!

Now, here, in I Corinthians 9:15-18 Paul shows them that even though he has this Christian liberty to be supported, he refuses to exercise that right and has decided to work with his hands to supply his own needs.

VERSES 15-18

Make no mistake about it, Paul had the right to be supported, but he did not use that right. And don't come to the conclusion that Paul wrote this because he was hinting that he wanted to be supported by the Corinthian Christians. Not at all. That is what Paul is saying here, "**But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me . . .**" I Corinthians 9:15.

Today, positions in the church tend to be taken to make money, to profit off of God. And that breaks my heart to hear these things when pastors want their people to provide jets and-so-on for them. We are serving the Lord and whatever God provides, we should be thankful.

Paul served because he loved the Lord and when your service to the Lord is not done out of love, then get out of it because you are not helping anyone, not even yourself!

When I came up here from Chicago some 24 years ago, I was making over \$25 per hour at the hospital in Chicago as a Registered Nurse. That was a lot of money back then!

But I knew the church was small and couldn't support me without working outside of the church, and that was not an issue for me. And when I started work at the hospital up here, I started out at just under \$16 per hour, a big difference from what I was making and doing the same job, but that was not a factor for me.

I came up here because of the call of God upon my life to do so, my love for the Lord, my love for you and to preach and teach you the Word of God, to get the Gospel message out!

I am not boasting but what I am saying is when you are called, you will not let anything get in your way of what God wants you to do no matter how unfair at times it might seem!

Let me put this into perspective for you. What rights do we have that we are willing to sacrifice for the cause of others, for the cause of Christ? We must be willing to sacrifice everything, and God will take care of us.

You see, it is just putting into practice what God is showing us and I do understand that at times it can be difficult, but true joy is found in: **Jesus, Others and then Yourself!**

As we read on in I Corinthians 9:19-27, Paul explains to them that he would give up every right for the sake of winning his race for Christ and souls for the kingdom!

VERSES 19-23

Now as some read this, they take it to an unbiblical conclusion, that we just have to accept whatever anyone believes. That is not what Paul is saying, not at all!

Paul's point is simple. He is free to do whatever he wants but because of love he was not going to do anything to hurt a weaker brother and he was going to minister to people on their level, where they are coming from, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Paul didn't water down his message or make it more tolerable, less offensive, but he spoke it forth in truth.

Now, what does Paul mean when Paul says, "**To the Jew I became as a Jew**"? I think he is referring to Jewish customs or maybe even secular Jews.

What about when he says, "**To those under the law I became as one under the law**"? I think he is talking about orthodox Jews.

You see, to the Jew, he became a Jew as we saw in Acts 21:23-26 when Paul participated in the Jewish purification ceremony. He knew that this was not necessary, but it was to be a bridge so that he may share with the Jews Jesus Christ.

To the Gentiles, the Law was not an issue with them, he became like the Gentiles so that he may win them to Christ.

Please, please understand that Paul didn't change the message for he said in I Corinthians 1:22-25, **“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”**

All Paul did was change his appearance you might say, his behavior so that he may see some saved!

Poole put it like this, “To the Gentiles he behaved himself as if he himself had been a Gentile, that is, forbearing the observances of the Levitical law, to which the Gentiles had never any obligation at all.”

And Pastor Chuck Smith wrote, “Paul sought to win people to Jesus Christ by being sensitive to their needs and identifying with them. We should try to reach people where they are today and expect to see changes later.”

And here are a couple of other thoughts on this, first from Fee as he tells us, “This passage has often been looked to for the idea of ‘accommodation’ in evangelism, that is, of adapting the message to the language and perspective recipients. Unfortunately, despite the need for that discussion to be carried on, this passage does not speak directly to it. This has to do with how one lives or behaves among those whom [he] wishes to evangelize.”

And this is what Clarke has to say regarding these verses, “Let those who plead for the system of accommodation on the example of St. Paul, attend to the end he had in view, and the manner in which he pursued that end. It was not to get money, influence, or honour, but to save *SOULS!* It was not to get ease but to increase his labours. It was not to save his life, but rather that it should be a sacrifice for the good of immortal souls!”

And lastly, one writer put it like this,

In summary, Paul became all things to all men, that he might by all means save some. He did not compromise the gospel. He would not change the least truth in the least way in order to satisfy anyone. But he would condescend in any way for anyone if that would in any way help bring him to Christ. He would never set aside a truth of the gospel, but he would gladly restrict his liberty in the gospel. He would not offend Jew, Gentile, or those weak in understanding.

If a person is offended by God’s Word, that is his problem. If he is offended by biblical doctrine, standards, or church discipline, that is his problem. That person is offended by God.

But if he is offended by our unnecessary behavior or practices – no matter how good and acceptable those may be in themselves – his problem becomes our problem. It is not a problem of law but a problem of love, and love always demands more than the law. “Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two.” (Matt 5:39-41).

Paul’s life centered in living out the gospel and in preaching and teaching the gospel. Nothing else was of any concern to him. I do all things for the sake of the gospel. His life was the gospel. He therefore set aside anything that would hinder its power and effectiveness.

- John MacArthur

And listen again to why Paul did this, and it was not for himself. He wrote, “**Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.**” I Corinthians 9:23. Paul was willing to offend people over the gospel, but he wanted to offend them *only* over the gospel.

VERSES 24-27

Make no mistake about it, like today, sporting events were big in Paul’s day!

This was especially meaningful to the Corinthians, because their city was the center for the Isthmian Games, second in prestige to the ancient Olympics.

And like the Olympics of today, these athletes trained very hard, some 10 months outside of Corinth and then the last month in Corinth under a trainer who worked them hard to prepare them.

They could have done things that would have hindered their training, they had the liberty, but they didn’t because they wanted to win.

All that to prepare for a race or event that the winner would receive a wreath that would perish very quickly!

As Christians, we need to understand that the Christian life is not a sprint, but it is a marathon!

When I was much younger, I ran two Chicago Marathon’s! And I will tell you this, I did not run the race to get a tee-shirt to tell everyone I ran the Chicago Marathon! No, I ran the race to finish the race and, even though I was not going to win it, I ran to win!

Now there were some who just wanted the prestige of running the race. Some ran a few miles, other’s just about ten miles, and maybe even twenty miles, but they did not finish. There were those who sprinted out and ran hard, but before long they were out of gas and dropped out.

Make no mistake about it, a marathon is a long-distance race that you must prepare before you run it, and you must pace yourself, so you don't drop out!

Now you may be wondering how that applies to us as Christians? Think about it. Are you the person who feels, ***"All I care about is just getting into heaven, I don't care about any rewards or crowns!"*** I hope not!

Paul is admonishing them and us to go all out, so that we can be rewarded, and, in the end, we can place those crowns at the feet of Jesus, the One who has enabled us to do what we have done. All we did was walk by faith!

And training is important. There was a wrestler who asked his coach, "Can't I smoke and drink and have a good time and still wrestle?" The coach replied, "Yes, you can, but you can't win!"

Interestingly enough, the Greek word for **"temperate"** in verse 25 is a word that means "self-control." Don't feed the flesh, feed the spirit, build up the inner man and you will hunger and thirst after the things of God instead of the flesh!

For us as Christians, we too are in a race and we need to be ready to run, to compete. We should be in training daily by being in the Word of God and then exercising our faith.

We should avoid those things that will not build us up in the faith.

You see, we are running for an imperishable crown, a crown that is a reward for service and here the crown is that of seeing others saved, a reward for sharing your faith and seeing people come to know the Lord!

And here in I Corinthians 9:27 Paul uses the phrase, **"I discipline my body."** That can be translated like this, ***"to strike under the eye; to give a black eye."***

In other words, Paul did not want his flesh to get the better of him, not that he physically beat himself up, but he fed his spirit and made his flesh a slave and not lord of his life. As I have said, feed the spirit, the inner man and not the flesh!

Why did Paul do this?

The reason Paul did this was so that he would not be “**disqualified**”, not that he would lose his salvation, but he would lose the rewards, not be used for future work.

He had to follow the rules that the Judge had set forth, the Lord. You see, if he didn't deal with the flesh he would be in trouble and so will we!

Thus, be submissive to the Holy Spirit, listen to what God is saying to you, have a disciplined life, have self-control under the control of the Lord.

Paul did finish the race that God set before him, and he finished strong! How are you running?

So many Christians start strong, but they don't finish well or at all.

I CORINTHIANS 10

VERSES 1-5

Keep in mind when Paul wrote this letter, he did not write it with verses and chapter divisions. Thus, what Paul was saying in chapter 9 flows right into what he is saying here in chapter 10.

Paul just got done speaking about running the race of faith to win, not just to compete or finish!

And now, as he moves on, Paul is using the nation of Israel as an example of a group of people who were in the race, who saw the hand of God upon their lives, and yet were disqualified because of their idolatry, their immorality, their refusal to repent and get right with God.

Paul is telling the self-confident Corinthian's to be careful, for the nation of Israel was very confident and look what happened to them. Don't go down that same path; learn the lesson, for what happened to them can easily happen to you!

And I guess you can say that the key verse in this chapter is I Corinthians 10:12,

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”

Look at what Paul is saying here. First of all he speaks of the cloud or the Shekinah glory, the presence of God, as a supernatural protection and a supernatural guidance throughout their wilderness wanderings.

At night God's glory was seen as a pillar of fire to keep them warm, and during the day God's glory was seen as a cloud to shade them from the hot sun.

Thus, every day and every evening they had a constant reminder of God being with them. In Exodus 13:21-22 we are told, **“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.”**

God was continually before them and what God did with His children back then, He does with us today, guiding us, protecting us as we are in Christ.

We are told in Luke 1:78-79, **“Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”**

God not only guides us, but He protects us as we are running the race that He has set before us, the course He wants us to run!

Now, as the nation of Israel was set free from their bondage in Egypt, Pharaoh and the Egyptians changed their mind and came after them, cornering them at the Red Sea, with mountains on the right and left side of them and Pharaoh and his army before them, there was no escape from a human perspective!

It did look hopeless but God, the protector of His people, guided them through the Red Sea as He parted the waters and they crossed over on dry land. As they exited the Red Sea the Egyptians entered it and God caused the waters to fall back down upon them and killed the Egyptian army drowning them in the waters. (Exodus 14:21-31)

The picture here is the people were baptized into Moses in the sense that they identified themselves with him as their leader.

For us as Christians, we are baptized into Christ; we identify ourselves with Him as our leader.

Paul, in Romans 6:3-4 tells us, **“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”**

And Paul, in I Corinthians 12:13 tells us, **“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”**

Thus, to be in the race we must identify ourselves with Christ!

Then Paul speaks of how God provided food for the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings, supernaturally, manna or bread from heaven! (Exodus 16)

For us as Christians, Jesus is the bread of life as we are told in John 6:31-35, **“Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”** Then Jesus said to them, **‘Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’** Then they said to Him, **‘Lord, give us this bread always.’** And Jesus said to them, **‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.’”**

Thus, to be able to finish the race you need to partake of the bread of life, you have to have a good spiritual diet, or your body will weaken, and you will drop out, become disqualified!

Not only did God provide food for them in a supernatural way, but He also provided water to sustain them in their journey. (Exodus 17:6)

For us today, Jesus is the living water that refreshes our souls.

In John chapter 4, as Jesus encounters the woman of Samaria at the well we are told, **“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’** The woman said to Him, **‘Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?’** Jesus answered and said to her, **‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’”**

Also, in John 7:37-39 we are told, **“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”**

And Paul tells us that this Rock in the wilderness that provided water for them to drink followed them wherever they would go. Paul is picking up on a rabbinical tradition that says this very thing, that this Rock that had water flow from it followed them throughout their journey, and Paul tells us that the Rock that sustained them is ***CHRIST!***

That same Rock, Jesus Christ sustains us with refreshing, life-giving water through His Spirit.

Now, if we do not take in this life-sustaining water we will drop out of the race, become dried up, and disqualified for service!

And here is the point. Israel had all these things from the Lord, all these blessings, all these signs to show to them that God is real and to guide them and sustain them and protect them on their journey, they couldn't lose, or could they?

Listen to what Paul says. **“But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.”** I Corinthians 10:5.

You see, out of the over 2 million Jewish people that left Egypt, only two of that generation finished the race and entered into the Promise Land and they were Joshua and Caleb!

All the rest were disqualified for service, even Moses and Aaron! (Numbers 14:27-35)

And please understand that not all were unsaved that died in the wilderness, some were just disqualified for service.

Think about all the blessings they had, and they never entered into the land that God intended them to have because pride led them to self-confidence and idolatry, immorality and a refusal to repent and get right with God. Paul was trying to get the Corinthian church to listen so they would not go down this same path and be disqualified!

Is the church listening today? Are we listening?

VERSES 6-10

In these verses we see Paul give to us four areas that brought the children of Israel down, that disqualified them for service.

They were: *Idolatry*, *Sexual Sin*, *Tempting God* and *Complaining*, which I find interesting!

Now why is this important to us? Because they are examples for us to learn from. They are here so we will not go down that same path and be disqualified for service. God wants us to finish the race strong!

First of all, they lusted or craved for other things besides God, which lead them into *idolatry*.

Remember the story. As Moses was up on Mount Sinai getting the commandments of God, the children of Israel were already breaking them as they worshiped the true and living God in the wrong way, making a golden calf! (Exodus 32:1-6)

Now you may not be making little idols to worship but anything that takes you away from God can become an idol in your life, it doesn't have to be a statue that you bow down to!

Also, we need to recognize this is a heart issue as we are told in Ezekiel 14:3, “**Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity . . .**”

Thus, flee idolatry before it disqualifies you from the race that God has you in!

Then, in verse 8, we see *sexual sin* or fornication that is spoken of. And this comes out of Numbers 25:1-3 where we are told, “**Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.**”

This is born out of the story of Balak, a Moabite King who wanted Balaam to pronounce a curse upon the children of Israel and God would not allow it.

Each time he spoke a blessing came out. Thus, to gain some money, Balaam found a loop-hole and told the King to get the women of his nation together, dress them in seductive clothes and go and entice the men of Israel to worship their gods through sexual activity, and it worked!

Out of this God destroyed 24,000 Jews total, according to Numbers 25:9, and Paul tells us *that in one day* God destroyed 23,000 because of their sin!

Sexual sin is a tool of the enemy that he uses and no matter how strong we think we are, how confident we may be in this area, learn the lesson, don't put yourself in a situation that will cause you to drop out of the race!

Next Paul speaks of *tempting God* and it comes out of Numbers 21:4-9 as the Children of Israel pushed God, tempted Him.

You see, God provided food for them, water for them on their journey and all they could do is complain about it.

Instead of serving the Lord, pleasing Him, they were more interested in what they didn't have, and God brought judgment upon them in the form of deadly snakes and many died because of their testing God!

Don't see how far you can push God or see how close to the edge you can walk before you will fall, before you are off course and out of the race!

And the fourth one is their *complaining* and Paul's reference is from Numbers 16:1-47 which deals with the rebelling of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and God judging them.

The result we are told in Numbers 16:41, "**On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of the LORD.'**"

They blamed Moses for this and in reality, they were blaming God, complaining that God is not fair in His judgment. Because of that God brought judgment upon them and 14,700 Jews were killed.

God is not honored with our complaining, never!

Thus, may we be like Paul who said, "**Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**"

Philippians 4:11-13.

Don't let your complaining cause you to be disqualified in the race that God has you in but be content in whatever state you are in!

VERSES 11-13

Make no mistake about it, these examples are timeless. They are for each generation to learn from and to say you didn't know is not an excuse, God has told us in His Word!

The Corinthians were proud, and Paul warns them to be careful because those that are strong are the ones who fall and those who know they are weak and must depend upon the Lord will stand, will finish the race.

It is as Solomon said, "**Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.**" Proverbs 16:18.

Now the word that Paul uses for "**temptation**" is the Greek word PEIRASMOS, (pi-ras-mos') and it simply means to test or prove.

God is showing us what is in our heart, He is testing our faith and the outcome is based upon how we respond to the testing, be it positive or negative!

We must also note that in these tests God provides a way out – through Jesus Christ, not that the matter is resolved but we can go through it in His strength or we can succumb to the temptation and dishonor God!

I will speak a little more on that in a minute. Listen to what Paul says next.

VERSE 14

Make no mistake about it, there are times we are to flee in the situations that are before us. Like Joseph did when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him.

J. Vernon McGee picks up on this idea of escaping temptation by fleeing. He wrote, “One of the reasons we yield to temptation is that we are like the little boy in the pantry. His mother heard a noise because he had taken down the cookie jar. She said, ‘Willie, where are you?’ He answered that he was in the pantry. ‘What are you doing there?’ He said, ‘I’m fighting temptation.’ My friend, that is not the place to fight temptation! That is the place to start running.”

But let me also say this. Yes, fleeing from temptation is one way but it does not apply to every situation.

Hear me out on this. God does bring temptations into our lives to test our faith. Think about it. The Holy Spirit brought Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan!

And Jesus escaped the power of those temptations by:

DRAWING CLOSE TO GOD – IN THE FATHER’S POWER!

THE WORD OF GOD – KNOWING THE WORD!

The bottom line is this. If we want to endure temptations, we must stay close to God in prayer and know His Word, and then trust in His promises to us and His power given to us by His Spirit, to deliver us!

VERSES 15-22

Since the Corinthian Christians tended to pride themselves on their “*wisdom*,” Paul challenges them – if they are truly wise – to carefully consider what he says here.

And Paul is speaking of the idolatry that took place in the pagan temples and he is challenging the Corinthians, who saw themselves as wise, to examine what they are doing and see if it is honoring to God, examine their hearts or has pride blocked their view?

And here we see Paul using Christian communion to show our fellowship, our oneness, our unity with Christ.

The cup of blessing or the third cup of wine they drank at the Passover meal was the cup in which Jesus instituted the New Covenant in His blood by. It is also called the cup of redemption.

The bread symbolized the body of Christ.

Thus, if in this we are showing our oneness with God, then partaking of these banquets in these pagan temples is showing that they were honoring these idols, these gods, that they were uniting themselves with demons!

And I am not going to spend a lot of time on this because we covered it in the Gospel According to John. But in communion we do not partake of the actual body and blood of Christ, called transubstantiation in the Roman Catholic Church.

How do we know that?

Because Jesus would not have His disciples break the Law and, in the Law, you could not partake of blood, because the life was in the blood.

Also, Jesus would not promote cannibalism, that would also be wrong!

This is symbolic. How do I know that? Listen carefully. Jesus said this in John 6:63, in this section that the Roman Catholic Church uses to prove it is the actual body and blood of Christ that they are partaking of, **“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”**

In other words, this was symbolic of the body and blood of Christ, just as when we read that Jesus is the Door, He is the light and-so-on.

Now, back in I Corinthians 8:4 Paul said that an idol is nothing and now he says they are demons, is he contradicting himself?

Not at all. Paul is saying that there are demonic forces out there that will try to deceive people and enslave them in these things. Satan and his demonic forces want praise and they get it through the worship of these idols.

Thus, as Christians, be careful who you are joining yourself to – it should be the Lord! You can't play with fire without getting burned as Paul said, "**are we stronger than He [God]?**" And the answer is, of course, ***NO!***

Think of Paul speaking this idea like this, "***It's never about the statue or animal sacrifice in idolatry that you have to worry about - it's the deity that the statue represents and the animal is being sacrificed to because that's a demon and that's what you are opening yourself up to when you go to a pagan temple service looking to eat the meat of the animal that was sacrificed during that service.***"

"Just as we Christians eat the bread because we want to celebrate our oneness with our God and Savior - so to the pagans eat of the sacrifice to become one with their god which is actually a demon - do you want to become one with a demon?"

I hope that helps.

VERSES 23-24

The word "**edify**" here is the Greek word OIKODOMEIO, (oy-kod-om-eh'o) and it speaks of building up, like a house.

The idea here is we are to do those things that will help us to grow spiritually, those things that are beneficial for us instead of things that will tear us down, break us up, destroy us. It makes sense but many times when we find ourselves in a situation we depart from the truth and believe a lie, we think we know better than God. Thus, be careful, be humble, do what is wise!

Now let me share a few things with you because I think this is important for us as Christians. You see, there are ways we can grow spiritually speaking; physically growing doesn't seem to be a problem for most Americans but spiritual growth can be a problem if we don't take care of these issues.

First, we can grow as we read and apply God's Word to our lives. Paul, in speaking to the Ephesian elders said in Acts 20:32, **“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”**

Also, in II Timothy 3:16-17, and this is from The Amplified Bible, we are told regarding the Word of God, **“Every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration) and profitable for instruction, for reproof and conviction of sin, for correction of error and discipline in obedience, [and] for training in righteousness (in holy living, in conformity to God's will in thought, purpose, and action), So that the man of God may be complete and proficient, well fitted and thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

Secondly, we can grow spiritually as others preach and teach us the things of God. Paul, in I Corinthians 14:3-4 tells us, **“But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.”**

Lastly, we can grow spiritually by walking in faith, serving the Lord as Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:12-13, and this is from The Amplified Bible, **“His intention was the perfecting and the full equipping of the saints (His consecrated people), [that they should do] the work of ministering toward building up Christ’s body (the church), [That it might develop] until we all attain oneness in the faith and in the comprehension of the [full and accurate] knowledge of the Son of God, that [we might arrive] at really mature manhood (the completeness of personality which is nothing less than the standard height of Christ’s own perfection), the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ and the completeness found in Him.”**

As we do that then we will love others with the love of Christ and not seek our own will but the will of the Father for the edification of the body of Christ, to see people grow in the Lord!

VERSES 25-30

Remember what Paul said in I Timothy 4:4-5, **“For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”** In other words, eat whatever you want and thank the Lord for the blessing He has provided for you to eat!

And please understand that the meat was not infected with demons, but Paul is speaking of not going into the temple and partaking of these things.

You could buy these meats in the meat market that were offered to idols, that is not a problem unless it bothers you or an unsaved friend invites you over and tells you that the meat was used in the sacrifice to other gods. You see, that may make them think it is okay, and it is not, you are not worshipping their false god!

If a brother has a problem with eating meat sacrificed to an idol, just tell him **“The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.”** Psalm 24:1.

Think of it like this. The cows belong to the Lord, they are His and thus, eating them is not a problem. If a brother still has a problem with this, respond in love!

VERSES 31-33

Keep in mind that chapter divisions and verses were not in the original, they were added much later for our help.

And I think Paul’s thought flows on into verse 1 of I Corinthians chapter 11 were he says, **“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”** I will speak more on this in a minute.

As you look at these verses there are two great rules that should guide us as Christians.

The first is that all that we do we do for **“the glory of God.”**

The second follows it, and that is that we are to look out for the welfare of our fellow man.

It is as Jesus said, **“... ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”** Good rules to live by!

So let’s look at these for a minute. Are the things that you are doing bringing glory to God, are they building you up, are they helping others? If they are then continue doing them. If they are not, then flee from them! Good principles to follow as we are in this race that God has set before us!

Again, we see the heart of Paul here that his actions would save many. That they would see God in him and be drawn to the true and living God and I believe that is our hearts desire, that people would see God in us, that the flesh life would melt away so that they may come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior!

As we read in our study of Corinthians, the believers were self-confident, self-seeking and thus Paul tells them to get refocused, to follow him as he is following Christ, to get back on the course that God had set for them.

We are on a new course, not running to and fro and being directed by the prince of this world, but by the Lord and the course He has set for us is perfect.

We have a purpose in life, to bring glory to God. We were created for His good pleasure, and thus, the plan, the race that God has us in He will see us through till the end! Walk in the liberty that God has given you but do so in love and not as the Corinthian's were doing – stay in the race!