*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 3 - 8

*First Corinthians Chapters Eight and Nine*

**Monday, February 3 1 Corinthians 8:1-6**

*“About food that has been offered to idols”*

 Most meat sold in the town marketplace came from sacrificial animals that had been slaughtered at pagan temple ceremonies. Did these rituals somehow automatically taint the food? Could Christians buy it? Could they eat it if it was offered to them at friends’ homes? What about the various social events – weddings, parties, clubs, and so on – which often used the temple dining halls for their festivities? Could Christians participate and eat meat at these events? What about more overtly religious rites in those temples?

 In verses 1-3 Paul indicates, even before he gets into the details of the issue, that Christians always need to let love, not knowledge, be the last word. Knowledge doesn’t always make us considerate of others but has a tendency to make us proud. In verses 4-6 Paul takes the side of those who see nothing wrong with eating meat offered to idols. He agrees with them that there is only one God and that an idol is nothing. He goes so far as to suggest that there is no religious significance to what is eaten or not eaten.

*Spiritual knowledge, Lord, must always be lived out in love. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 4 1 Corinthians 8:7-13**

*“However, not all believers know this”*

 Paul’s *“however”* in verse 7 introduces the reality that not everyone in the church knew there was only one true God. Paul reminds his readers that what is safe for one Christian may not be safe for another because of his different background, different temperament, or different level of maturity. There were church members whose consciences would not let them eat meat offered to idols, and they would do great violence to themselves if they went against their conscience.

 Paul made those who had the greater knowledge the object of his counsel. He suggested that they start by substituting love for their fellow Christians for their knowledge of what was right or wrong. Paul taught Christians to celebrate the freedom that they had found in Christ, but he emphasized that no Christian has a right in the exercise of his or her freedom to undermine the faith of another Christian. His plain advice is that those who know there is nothing wrong with a certain behavior are still to refrain from it in order not to create problems for the weaker brother.

*Disregard for my fellow Christians, Lord, is disregard for you. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 5 1 Corinthians 9:1-12**

*“We did not insist on our rights”*

 Paul turns now to a second illustration of the principle that Christian freedom should be tempered by the voluntary relinquishing of one’s rights. Itinerant Greco-Roman philosophers and religious teachers were often paid for their “services” by well-to-do followers. The wealthy members in the Corinthian church doubtless would have preferred to have Paul accept their money in return for deference to their views on spiritual matters. When he refused and continued to rely on tent-making for his income, they charged that his unwillingness to go along with their patronage demonstrated that he did not have the same authority as other itinerant apostles or preachers.

 Verses 1-12 present the case in some detail for Paul’s authority as an apostle and his right to be paid for his services. Yet in keeping with his “yes we have these rights, but for the sake of the gospel we don’t insist on them” logic, and in defense of his actual behavior, verses 13-18 then explain why Paul has in fact renounced this right (see below).

*As did Paul, Lord, I willingly lay aside my rights for the sake of the gospel. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 3 - 8

*First Corinthians Chapters Eight and Nine*

**Thursday, February 6 1 Corinthians 9:13-18**

*“This is why I don’t demand my rights”*

 The essential reason that Paul has refused payment for his ministry is that he wants to avoid all possible charges of impure motives or misuse of funds which, in turn, could harm the message of the gospel. He clarifies that by addressing the topic of payment, he is not presenting a subtle hint that he wishes to reverse his policy and begin receiving compensation. God has placed an irresistible call on his life to preach. To do so is for Paul not a voluntary enterprise for which he deserves remuneration from his listeners but a God-given responsibility whose reward is the opportunity to do so without demanding payment. While there were times in Paul’s ministry that he accepted money from churches (for example, he speaks of this in his letter to the Philippians), he never demanded or expected it.

 Paul did not include this subject in his letter to make people feel sorry for him. He was illustrating that when he encouraged them to lay aside certain liberties, he himself was already doing what he was asking them to do.

*The reward for what we do for you, Lord, is built into the doing of it. Amen.*

**Friday, February 7 1 Corinthians 9:19-23**

*“I try to find common ground with everyone”*

 Whatever Paul does, he wants to clear the ground of unnecessary obstacles that might hinder unbelievers from coming to Christ. The main thought of these verses is essentially stated six times: to win or save “as many as possible,” “the Jews,” “those under the law,” “those not having the law,” “the weak,” and “some.” Freedom from human entanglements allows Paul to give the best possible service to the widest range of people. Already having mentioned “the Jews,” “those under the law” probably include Gentile God-fearers and proselytes to Judaism. “Those not having the law” refers to Gentiles apart from any Jewish influence.

 Paul understands that with the death of Christ the age of the Law has come to an end. The Hebrew Scriptures are still relevant for followers of Jesus but only as they are interpreted in light of what Christ has done. Nevertheless, to Jews and others under the Law, Paul at times acts as if he is still subject to all of the laws of Moses, so long as it is clear that his actions are not a requirement of salvation or spiritual maturity in any way.

*It is a blessing, Lord, to share the gospel and see people saved from sin. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 8 1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

*“Run the [Christian] race with purpose”*

 Corinth hosted one of the most famous of the Greek athletic events, second only to the Olympic Games. What Christians and athletes have in common is the need for strict discipline and strenuous training. But Paul felt that the Christian race was different in at least two ways. The crown the athletes received was a wreath which soon wilted, while the reward of the faithful Christian would last forever. Also, in the competitions only one person could win, while in the Kingdom of God, every child of God has the potential for success.

 Paul reminds us that we are all human and need to be continually aware of the discipline needed to do well what God has called us to. Otherwise, the temptations that arise from within ourselves, as well as those that the world offers, will sidetrack us from doing the Lord’s will. Paul began this chapter with the ringing declaration that he is free, but he closes it with the somber reminder that he is also human and needs to be continually on guard that he not misuse his freedom.

*I will live with disciplined purpose, Lord, that I may run the race well. Amen.*