

Group Study Outline

LAUNCHING QUESTION

What time should we hold our Sunday services at Emmanuel?
What considerations should be borne in mind in making that decision?

RECAP

Use material from p1 of these notes to give some background to the issues

QUESTIONS

READ 1 Corinthians 9:1-23

It seems as if we're now dealing with a different issue: should the Christians in Corinth pay Paul for his ministry?

What reasons does Paul give (in 1-12) as to why he has a 'right' to be paid?

What he has done about this 'right'? has he claimed it?

Why / why not?

How would it be 'an obstacle in the way of the gospel' (12) if Paul were paid?

Can you think of contemporary examples where the issue of money has hindered the gospel? (eg TV evangelists, a lavish papacy, etc)

Can you think of other ways in which people can't really hear the straightforward gospel of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (cf 2:2)? what kinds of things have been an obstacle meaning people don't hear us?

What does Paul do to ensure that people are saved (in 19-23)?

How has he worked out that principle re his financial support (in ch 9)?

How has he worked out that principle in ch 8?

Give a practical example of what Paul might do 'to become like a Jew'?

... or 'to become like one not under the law'?

APPLICATION

What might this look like for us?

How do we 'become like the people of Bramcote' to win them?

(this is deliberately vague ... allow lots of time for discussion to develop)

What things do we do that are, instead, putting up obstacles in the way of the gospel for the people of Bramcote?

Revisit the Launching Question: did others' salvation feature in your lists?

Are there other issues like this to be decided in a similar way?

Are there things we should do differently as a church because of this study?

If so, please contact the Leadership Team and suggest them ...

Are there things we should do differently personally because of this study?

1 Corinthians 9:1-23



1 Corinthians 8-10 at a glance

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a reply to a letter they'd previously sent him. ch 8-10 is about one of the topics they've raised with him (cf 7:1).

Corinth was a city with a huge number of pagan shrines – one on every street corner! So in the city, much money could be made from meat which was needed as a present to be offered to the idols, and afterwards could be sold on in the markets for home use. The end of ch 10 asks whether it is right to buy and eat such meat at home. But earlier in ch 8-10, it's a different issue. It seems as if a lot of meat was served up in pagan temples as a C1st restaurant, where you'd be taken for a business dinner/meal out. And any invite out to dinner would probably be here, eating 'idol food' with connotations that this was part of a sacrificial feast. Should Christians go?

Paul's answer ranges far more widely than this. Again and again, he shows that there are far bigger issues at stake: people's salvation matters most!

Theme Sentence for 9:1-23

Do everything for the sake of the gospel.

Context

In 8:1-13, Paul shows that there are two opinions amongst the Christians. One group are confident in the clear theology that they 'know' (4-6): they are sure that idols are nothing so of course it's fine to eat food that has been offered to them. The other group, 'the weak', is less confident because their 'former association with idols' (7) means that they continue to think of idols as real and as their food as contaminated.

The first lot is 'puffed up' (1) by their knowledge – perhaps being condescending towards 'the weak' and encouraging them to join them in eating. And some of 'the weak' have been persuaded by this encouragement, and now are eating food offered to idols even though they believe that they are wrong to do so. Paul is aghast. It is fatal to believe something is wrong/forbidden by God and to go ahead and do it ... that is sin, and sin is what leads to hell. How dreadful that these confident Christians are destroying their Christian brothers (by their sound theology, of all things!), and are thereby sinning against Christ (12).

Their knowledge isn't being used to build up the church but to destroy it. The church will only be built up if love becomes dominant ... if people radically change their behaviour for the sake of the salvation of others (13).

[NS]

Commentary

These notes follow the outline of the 12 Jan 2014 sermon at Emmanuel

Paul establishes his right

Paul has a 'right' to expect to expect the kind of support (listed in 4-6) in his itinerant ministry that senior leaders would normally get. If he sows a spiritual seed, then it's not unreasonable to expect financial harvest (11); those who proclaim the gospel should get their living from the gospel (14). Because ...

- **'human authority' (8)**

It is generally recognised that a worker gets financial gain for their work whether they are a soldier, vineyard-planter, shepherd (7), or temple worker (13).

- **the law (9)**

v9 quotes Deuteronomy 25:4, which Paul explains in 10. God says that all involved in crop production (from the ploughman at the start of the process to the thresher at the end, and the ox too!) can expect to share in the harvest.

- **the command of the Lord (14)**

Probably Paul is thinking of what Jesus says (in Matt 10:10; Luke 10:7) as he sends his disciples as missionaries: 'the worker is worthy of his keep'.

- **'others share this rightful claim' (12a)**

As the Corinthians already pay others, they show that they recognise this is a legitimate right that Paul has.

Paul abandons his right

9:4-14 strenuously argues a point; and then Paul sets all of that aside (12b, 15a): he is not asking the Corinthians to pay him. Why not?

- **he wants to offer the gospel 'free of charge' (15-18)**

It is Paul's 'boast' (15) that, when he preaches, the Corinthians don't pay him. (Actually, 16-17, he can't really boast about it: he has to preach since God gave him the job to do!) When he preaches, his 'reward' (18) or 'pay', is to receive 'no pay'! What he preaches is a gospel-for-free. And he wants to do this because ...

- **he does not want to hinder the gospel (12b-12c)**

Paul has already said that the only thing he would preach among them was 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (2:2). He thinks that if the issue of his pay got mixed in with his preaching, somehow that simple gospel message would be compromised.

The principle: do everything for the sake of the gospel

Paul gives us examples of how he works out this overriding principle in the varied situations described in 19-22.

First, like 'a servant' (19) of those he was with, he put personal wishes or ambition to one side to fit in totally with the life-style of the person he was serving. This was the extent to which he became like them, acting in a way that made him look like them. There were limits to this:

- he wouldn't actually become one of them (eg by trying to keep the law as a way to get right with God, as 'those under the law' might do);
- he wouldn't copy the behaviour of someone disobeying Jesus, but would rather remain 'under the law of Christ' (21).

But otherwise, in terms of his behaviour, he'd look identical. When among the Jews, he was kosher; when among the Gentiles, he was non-kosher.

It wasn't that Paul was flexible like this for flexibility's sake (which is what the phrase 'all things to all men' has generally come to mean). Nor was his aim to 'fit in', as if 'fitting in' is all that matters. No! He became like them with a very clear motive: in 19-23a, Paul explains that what motivates him is to 'win' (five times) or 'save' (22) as many people as possible. Driven by an evangelistic heart, he wants people to hear and respond to the gospel. And, if I do not become like those I am seeking to win, then I'll put obstacles in the way of that gospel (9:12).

Paul's attitude to his 'right' to expect payment for his ministry and the way he abandoned that right (in 9:4-14) is an obvious example of this principle.

Or ... imagine Paul out at a restaurant with some orthodox Jews, those 'under the law'. If Paul wanted primarily to make it clear to them that we're not put right with God by what we do or eat (ie that he is not under the law), he might make a point of eating non-kosher food. But the problem is that when he later tries to talk about Jesus Christ and him crucified, all those round the table don't listen to a word he says because all they can think about is his bacon butty! So instead (20), Paul makes a point of ordering kosher food, becoming exactly the same as them in this regard, so that nothing hinders the gospel when he tries to explain it.

In 22a, Paul's example is the 'weak' of ch 8. According to 8:13, he'll copy the behaviour of the weak and never eat meat again in order that gospel is not hindered among them, because he wants to see 'the weak' won too.

The application of this should be clear. How easily we can muddle the gospel by holding on too tightly to our personal cultural preferences, tastes and opinions: many of those things would unnecessarily alienate those we might seek to win for Christ. So easily remain in our cosy Christian cultural bubble and merely lob a few gospel tracts over the wall. In fact, we generally expect people to become like us if they want to know about Jesus!