

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: 1 Corinthians

Gray Areas Pt 2

The Pattern of Christian Liberties

1 Corinthians 9:1-27

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 02.05-06.11

Good morning Crossroads. Well, by now you know what to do. Take your bible and turn with me to 1 Corinthians, chapter 9. If you don't have a bible there should be one in the chair back in front of you. Go ahead and take that out. It's always good to follow along so you can understand the Word of God better. We're going to be working all the way through chapter 9 this morning, verses 1 through 27 continuing the series we started last week called Gray Areas. What we're doing is we're looking into the issue of Christian Liberty. Last week we looked at The Principle of Christian Liberty. This morning we're going to look at The Pattern of Christian Liberty.

We introduced the topic last week and we introduced the concept of Christian Liberties. If you weren't with us I gave a very clear definition. Let me give that to you again. Christian liberties are conduct or actions not specifically forbidden or permitted in scripture. In other words, it is conduct that the scripture does not speak about. We call these gray areas as opposed to black and white areas.

The scriptures are filled with black and white areas. Just as an example you go from one end of the scriptures to another and you can find that the scriptures are very clear about the subject of lying. It's forbidden. We're not to do that. The ninth Commandment in the Old Testament – Thou shall not bear false witness. You go into the New Testament. Jesus says let your yes be yes, your no's be no. We see over and over again. That's a black and white issue when it comes to lying.

Gray area or Christian liberties are not specifically mentioned in scripture. It's not that they're necessarily good for you or necessarily bad for you. It's just that the scriptures do not make any reference about them. Let me give you some things to chew on. For example, if I was going to make a list: smoking is a gray area. I say that because it's not specifically mentioned in the scripture. I had a woman stop me after last service and said but yes, what about that passage that talks about your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. I said, yes, that's exactly right. It does not give us a specific reference about smoking. I'm not saying that it's good for you. I'm just saying that it's not specifically mentioned. It's the same thing when we talk about alcohol. The scriptures are very clear that we should not drink to excess. But there are some within the Christian community that say you shouldn't drink at all. Any type of drop of alcohol would be a sin. That's not what the scriptures say. That's more of a gray area. We could say the same thing about gambling. We could go on and on. The lists are plentiful. The idea is is that what Christian liberties, what gray areas have to do with is conduct that's not specific in scripture. It's not specifically forbidden. It's not specifically permitted.

This is what we started with the understanding of last week. What we need to do is we need to have an objective ability. We need to have principles that we can look at to help us know how to answer the tough questions when it comes to gray areas; whether or not we should be

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involved with this gray area or that gray area; with this Christian liberty or that Christian liberty. We need that answer. We need those principles. And so that's what we set out to discover. What we're actually doing is we're actually working through the book of 1 Corinthians. We're allowing the book of 1 Corinthians because we're studying it verse by verse, it's called an exegetical study; we're allowing the book to dictate the topic. When we come to chapter 8 it's the topic of Christian liberty and this topic goes all the way through chapter 10. So we have 8, 9 and 10 to study about this topic.

You would think that Paul would start the conversation in chapter 8 telling us what we want to know, right? Tell me Paul what I need to know when making my decision in my gray areas. How do I know what is right and what is wrong. That's not where he starts. He starts rather with a principle. But the principle's not what you might expect. Rather than starting with our liberties, our freedom he actually starts with a different type of principle. Now, if you're in chapter 9 let me just remind you of this principle taking you back to chapter 8, verse 9. It's probably just one page back. Paul lays this principle down in the first chapter of the discussion. He says take care that this right, Christian liberty, this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. He starts it in a completely different trajectory than we might think. He starts by talking about how our Christian liberties, our practice of gray areas impacts other people. And he really starts by laying down a principle that says before you exercise any of these Christian liberties consider how it will impact others. That's where he starts.

Now, when you're talking about the issue of Christian liberties you could take one to two different extreme angles. You could say well, since it's such a complicated thing and I don't really want to offend anyone, I could become a legalist. A legalist is someone who has all of the issues of life codified and put into a type of do's and don'ts. In the New Testament we call these people Pharisees. The Pharisees had laws that they would live by and if the law did not speak about a gray area or about a Christian liberty they would create another law. And they would create a law on top of that and they would codify their lives to such an extent that they would be very careful about the dos and don'ts in their lives. That's an extreme position to take on gray areas - to live by all the dos and don'ts to create kind of your own code of conduct.

The other side is an also equal extreme and that is to go and say well, everything is open to me. That's called licentiousness. I have complete license. In other words, if it's not specifically stated in scripture then everything is open for me. No boundaries. That also is equally an extreme and dangerous. What we need to find is some kind of middle ground where Paul says here's a principle for you. You're not going to offend anybody. You're going to be able to live a Christian life that is glorifying the Lord and at the same time answering the tough questions about what I should and should not do in gray areas. Now, he lays down a principle in chapter 8. Now as we come to chapter 9 he's finally going to answer

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that questions we've been waiting for. He's going to give us the question how do I know if a gray area is right or wrong? So, let's start into chapter 9 and since it's a lengthy passage what I'm going to do is I'm just going to read through it and then I'm going to stop periodically and I'm going to give you context and help you build your understanding of this passage.

Beginning in verse 1, chapter 9 Paul writes, Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. Now, stop right there. Right off the bat we have to understand the context. What is Paul talking about? Obviously there were people in the church and outside the church of Corinth who were questioning whether or not his apostleship was true; whether or not he could be trusted as a man who could lead them to God. In fact, many were saying he was a charlatan; that he was a preacher for hire. And what he was doing was he was going all the way around Asia Minor planting these churches; setting up a type of Ponzi scheme so that he could draw off these people their money. He would preach to them. He would guide them. He would direct them into error. They would actually give toward his ministry and he would take that money and he would go on to somebody else and on and on and on. And people in Corinth we're saying we can't trust this man. He's not even a true Apostle. So, we come to chapter 9. He starts with a defense. You might think what does this have to do with Christian liberties and how does this answer the question what I know is to be right or wrong? Listen, this is where you have to follow carefully the context. Paul is going to use his own life as an example of how to know what to do and what not to do in the area of Christian liberties. He's going to use his own life example and he's going to set this up and he's going to show us a number of life patterns that we can incorporate into our life. So, how he's going to do this is he's going to defend himself; he's going to defend his right. He uses that word six times in about fifteen verses. It's an important word. He's going to defend his right to receive compensation as one who is a worker for the Gospel. Let's watch this. We're going to pick this up in verse 3.

This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right, there it is, to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Talking about Peter. Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? By the way, Barnabas was with him in Corinth. That's why he references him. Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Now, right off the bat like shotgun fire he gives us six rhetorical questions. He says, in general, who takes a job and doesn't get some kind of compensation for it? You might say that this is just obvious defense.

Now, he continues. He's going to switch his defense to the Word of God. He says, Do I say these things, verser 8, on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, now he's going to quote from Deuteronomy 25:4. He says, you shall

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not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain. Do you understand what he's saying? They would take, in those days, oxen and they would be the animal of choice to plow the field but they wouldn't muzzle the oxen. They wouldn't put a muzzle over its mouth; rather, they would allow it to eat when it was working. Who muzzles an ox while it's working? You don't do that. The same way in my case. He says, middle of verse 9, Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? See how he's laying down a pattern down of his defense? The obvious. Anybody who works for a living ought to receive some kind of compensation. Then he goes to the biblical defense.

Now he continues in the middle of verse 12. Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right. Note this. We're going to come back to it. But we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the Gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord, talking about Christ, commanded that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel.

Now, back up. Notice his defense. There's an obvious defense. There's a scriptural defense. There's a cultural defense – talking about those people working in the temple. And there's a defense that comes right from the teaching of Jesus that's if you work in the ministry you ought to receive compensation for that work. But did you notice what Paul said in the middle of verse 12. He said I'm willing to waive my rights so that I don't become an obstacle or be a stumbling block, another way of saying the same thing, for the Gospel of Christ. Now here's what he's going to lay down all throughout chapter 9. He's going to lay down this pattern; this illustration; this example that he has the right to receive compensation but because it was an issue for some in Corinth he's going to waive that right so that it doesn't become a stumbling block or an obstacle for the Gospel.

Now, you need to know that Paul was regularly compensated for his work with the churches. You read through the book of Acts, the churches in Macedonia and Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea all would contribute to Paul's livelihood but he waives that right before the Corinthians. This was a personal right but he sets it aside. Is it, when you talk about Christian liberties is it right, our personal right often the forefront of the discussion? When we talk about what we have the right or the liberties to do aren't we often when someone wants to restrict those get a bit defensive. We say no, that's my right. That was not Paul's attitude. He literally set that aside.

Now, I want you to jump down to verse 19. That's what I consider to be the heart of the passage. This is where we're going to start to learn two life patterns that if we incorporate

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into our life will help us answer the question what we can or what we should not be doing in the area of Christian liberties.

Now follow me closely. Verse 19. Paul says, for though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. What is he saying? He's saying I am giving my right that I might win more. What does that mean? He specifically talking about how his conduct will influence people for the Gospel. Do you understand that? Let's just stop right there; make sure we're all on the same page. Do you understand that God often uses us to reach other people for the sake of Christ? Think about it. Many of use come to Christ through the testimony or through the life of somebody else. We learn about Christ. We watch that person's life. We saw their pattern of life and we were influenced by that. Paul is saying we're not knowledgeable of this; in fact, we can through our conduct actually become an obstacle for God using us to influence someone for Christ. Do you see that? He says, conduct here is important so I'm going to limit my conduct so I might win people to Christ.

He says right here, notice. He says free from all. He's talking about freedom. The essential truth of the New Testament is freedom. Paul is the one who wrote, where the spirit of the Lord is there is freedom and he says I'm going to put that freedom aside and notice, he says, to be a servant to all. The word servant when you break it down actually equals the concept of slavery. He says, I'm willing to be in bondage. The word servant is the word *doulóō* in the Greek. It would have conjured all kinds of images for the people at Corinth. For the Jews it would have conjured up imagery of four-hundred years of bondage to the Egyptians. The Jewish people, very proud people would not want to ever be in bondage. They thought it was a disgrace to be in bondage to some other human entity. They felt they were in bondage to Yahweh so to be in enslaved was a defeat; equally so for a Greek-minded person. They would go all over the area and they would see people who were captive from other nations serving in the quarries that were building their city. They were people who were enslaved. These same slaves were later taken and they were used to defend in the army. Some of them rose up out of these slavery conditions to be the gladiators that fought in the Coliseum. But slavery would have been a real entity within the Greek world. It would have been there in their face on a regular basis. Not for us. I would imagine that none of us know anyone who's a slave but everyone in that culture would have and Paul is saying I'm willing to give up my freedom and become like a slave for the sake of the Gospel. Would you go to such lengths? He's willing to lay down his liberties.

John MacArthur in his commentary writes:

“We are reminded that in the gray areas of living, those that involve practices about which the Bible does not speak, Paul, as all believers, was free to do as his conscience allowed. But love would not let him do anything that the consciences of weaker believers would not allow. Love,

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(now watch this) would not even allow him to do things that would be offensive to unbelievers to whom he witnessed. He would put every questionable thing in his life under the control of love.”

Here's the first life pattern I want you to learn. Here's the first principle that comes out of the text and that is Paul epitomizes self-denial. Paul epitomizes denying self for the sake of the Gospel. Remember, Paul is putting himself up as one who is an example. It starts before you ever answer the question of what I should or should not do in the area of Christian liberty. It starts with a willingness to deny self.

Notice verse 19 again. He says, I've made myself. That's a reflective pronoun. That's like saying I, myself; I restrict myself; I don't do it under any compulsion. I do it myself. How does this work it's way out into life? Well, follow in verse 20. He says, to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. What is Paul saying? Paul is saying I came from a Jewish background. I was under the law. I was set free by Christ. I'm no longer under the law. I no longer have to live by the ceremonies and traditions of Judaism. Following or not following will not impact my Christianity but if following a Jewish tradition or ceremony will help me reach a Jew for the cause of Christ then I will gladly take up that tradition. I don't have to do it but I'll gladly do it.

See where he's about ready to go? Because if you keep going he's going to say that same principle over and over again in different contexts. Verse 21. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (Not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. Now he's talking about Gentiles. He's basically saying he was willing to live as a Gentile when he was with the Gentiles. He would shed his Jewish restrictions. He would eat what they ate; dressed as they dressed, why? So he could reach the Gentiles.

Keep reading. Verse 22. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people. In other words, he has become and he's able to fit into all social strata. Why? That by all means I might save some. I might be used of the Lord in the salvation process.

Verse 23 is the culmination. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share with them it its blessing. Do you hear what Paul is saying? You might say he's being a chameleon. Sounds like he's changing his colors. That's not what he's saying. He's saying I understand black and white code of conduct issues in my life. I know I have all kinds of liberties. I know I've been set free by Christ. I know that some of those liberties offend some people and so if I'm with some people where my liberties offend them I don't use my liberties. I know other people have liberties that I don't feel comfortable with and when I'm in that situation I allow

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them to live out their life but I don't impose my liberties on them. Hear what he's saying? I've become all things to all people.

Let me break it down in just like a real, real life analogy. I've told you this before. I have a set of friends. I have three really good friends that do not necessarily live the same lifestyle as I do. They're part of a group of men that we all kind of hang out with; probably about ten or twelve of us. These three men I'm the closest to. Whenever we get together I call them my ATF friends. ATF stands for alcohol, tobacco and firearms because whenever I'm with them they seem to be bringing alcohol, tobacco and firearms. Now, some of their lifestyle is not necessarily my lifestyle. They don't impose their lifestyle on me. Neither impose my lifestyle on them because if I would impose my lifestyle on them it's a good chance I would push them away and our friendship would deteriorate and I would not have the opportunity to present them with the Gospel. See how that works?

See, certain things that they do, frankly, is offensive to me. But I don't necessarily practice that so I don't have to take it personally. I don't have to limit my involvement in their life just because some of their practices are not my practices. Why? Because it's the same thing that Paul says. I'm trying to become all things to all people. You see, you've got to figure this out. There are certain liberties that the Lord has given you. He's not given us black and white in the Word of God. He's not forbidden or restricted certain activities in our lives. But, what we are hearing from Paul is you've got to be wise when you go about living those liberties out and you have to be gracious to those who don't necessarily live like you do and you have to be gracious to those who also live on a different level or that live unlike you do. So on both spectrums you have to demonstrate grace and you have to willing to deny self for the progress of the Gospel. That's the first life pattern.

The second life pattern he uses an analogy that we'll all understand especially on Super Bowl Sunday. He's going to use an athletic analogy. Are you ready for this? Verse 24, do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Do you hear what he's saying? He's saying think of the athlete. Now the Corinthians would have tuned right into this just like you're tuning in. They would have tuned into this because there were two types of athletic games that existed during the time of the Corinthians. There was the Olympic sport, the Olympic Games and then there was the Isthmus Games and the Isthmus Games happened to right at Corinth so these people would have been totally in tune because they would have had athletes living all over the place and so they would have tuned into Paul's analogy. He's saying, you see those athletes out there? See how they're living their life? That's how you need to live your life.

Here is what he's going to tell them. First life pattern – self denial. Second life pattern – be like an athlete. Live a self-controlled life. Live a life under discipline. Live a life of control. Watch this. Verse 25. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a

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perishable wreath, but we are imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control. Why do I do this Paul says? Lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. You see, he has learned you must control when he uses his Christian liberties and he might refrain at times. Just like an athlete must refrain from certain activities so that he can maintain self-control; maintain discipline; maintain the sense of, look at these words: athletic prowess. He is doing this why? So that he can win the race and doesn't become disqualified.

I see this all the time. Sometimes we as believers, we know we're free and we have these freedoms. We use our freedoms in the wrong context and we ruin our race. We've got to wise, why? Because people are watching you; looking at you. If you name the name of Christ now your conduct is always on display and you have to understand your conduct represents the one who has bought you – Jesus Christ. So there are times, because you know that you have to live a life that is, well, you have to deny self. Other times you have to live a life under extreme self-control because we're in a race, Paul says.

You say, alright. I understand that. I understand the life pattern but you still haven't answered the questions. How do I decide if a gray area conduct is right or wrong for me? Alright, you want to know the simple answer? Here's the simple answer. Scriptures aren't going to give you black and white. Scriptures are going to give you the principle and here's the principle. If you're living a life of self-denial and self-control when it comes to making a decision about gray areas do whatever you want. If you're living a life of self-denial and self-control then have freedom in the gray areas of your life because if you're living a life of denial you'll know that there are times in your life, like Paul had to restrict freedom for the benefit of the Gospel. Other times you'll have to live a life of self-control, discipline, under control so that it doesn't offend anyone else or they don't offend you. And so you understand self-control issues. If you are living self-denial, self-control you're free to make a decision. And your conscience then will be clear.

See what Paul was laying down here? Paul's saying the principle is never about you. It's always about others and the impact of the Gospel working through you. Do you understand that when Christ called you into His life He called you to be a representative to glorify Him. Live your life ultimately to glorify the name of Jesus Christ. If that is your goal then living a life of self-denial, self-control will naturally lead to wise decision making in the area of conduct. Let's pray together.