

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

1 CORINTHIANS 8-9

Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives - 30 Minute Meals with Rachel Ray - Cupcake Wars - Beat Bobby Flay... the Food Network was launched in 1993. In 2016 the cable channel was seen in over 95 million American homes.

Imagine, a *single television channel devoted to food and cooking* - it just proves what an impact food has on our daily lives... **And the same was true in Corinth.**

In fact, issues involving food had crept into their worship. A major debate had erupted in the church over this issue of food and eats. I have no doubt if there had been a Food Network at the time, this controversy would've become primetime programming.

"Tailgate Warriors" would've aired live from Corinth. A messy food fight had started in the Corinthian church, and Paul steps in to make sure it gets **chopped!**

Chapter 8 begins, **"Now concerning things offered to idols..."** Remember, at this point in 1 Corinthians, we're listening to one side of a two-sided conversation. Paul is answering questions asked in a previous letter. And one of the questions involved meat sacrificed to idols.

In the ancient world, there were two places to purchase hamburger... You could go to the market and pay premium prices, or you could buy beef from the pagan temples. When an animal was sacrificed to an idol, the priests ate a portion; then the leftover cuts were sold to raise revenues for the

temple. Some of the Corinthian Christians purchased the bargain beef.

The Corinthians weren't idolaters; they were just shrewd shoppers, coupon clippers. They hated paganism and what went with it; they just liked getting their ground round on the cheap. *But was this right?*

How can a Christian eat meat he or she knows was sacrificed to an idol? The idea of guilt-by-association had been firmly etched in their minds. *If it was in the devil's freezer, how can you put it on the grill for God?*

And this was not just an issue for the ancients. A recent headline appeared in World Net Daily, "Has Your Thanksgiving Turkey Been Sacrificed to Idols?"

The author reported that America's most popular turkey brand, *Butterball*, is now processing their turkeys according to "halal" or Islamic standards.

Millions of Americans might've eaten a Thanksgiving turkey that was blessed in the name of "Allah."

What if you were shopping for a Thanksgiving turkey and *the best buy was Butterball*? Would it matter to you if it had received an Islamic blessing?

You're going to gather at your table and eat meat to the glory of Jesus. The money you save will even be donated to your church! Is it ok to buy the Butterball, or will this purchase make you *a turkey* in God's eyes?

This very issue had divided the church in Corinth.

Some said “yes,” others “no,” but everyone was adamant, *“they were right.”* More revealing than the debate was the haughtiness and arrogance it showed.

Paul will deal with *their beef*, but first he addresses their pride: *“We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.”* *Knowledge puffs up; love builds up.*

It’s interesting though, there was knowledge on both sides of this issue. Folks on the *“don't do it side”* understood the dangers of idolatry. Demonic forces were behind the worship of false gods... Whereas, folks on the *“go to it side”* knew that idols were nothing but sticks of wood. False gods don't exist, and meat sacrificed on their altars was just that, a piece of meat.

The *“don't do its”* and *“go to its”* each had valid points. The problem was that both groups failed to recognize the legitimacy of each other's concerns.

They thought, *“I’m right and you’re wrong.”* Their knowledge went to *their heads*, not to *their hearts*.

The football helmet my son used to wear contained a rubber bladder you inflated with air. There was a nozzle on top where you inserted the needle. *I'm afraid most of us have a similar nozzle imbedded on our scalp.* We learn a little truth and it goes to our heads.

We’re right and everybody else is wrong. In chapter 5, Paul used *“leaven”* or yeast, as a type of sin. Why? Because it *“corrupts by puffing up.”* Sin causes pride.

The most dangerous person in the church is the guy who knows just enough to think he knows it all!

Be leery of the self-proclaimed expert who feels it his duty to roam the church and police the saints. I love the quote, "Some people drink at the fountain of knowledge, others just gargle." Beware of the garglers.

Paul says to both camps in Corinth, *let some air out of your head and pump some love into your heart.*

The Corinthians had *big-heads*, but *small-hearts*. It's been said, "Love without truth is hypocrisy, but truth without love is brutality." We won't always agree on every issue, but we can always show each other love.

Paul's concludes in verse 3, "But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him." The key to knowing God is *the heart*, not *the head*. Blaise Pascal once wrote, "Man's wisdom must be understood to be loved, but God's wisdom must be loved to be understood."

Head knowledge has a place. God's truth is vital to our faith. But academic knowledge alone is not enough to save us. Real saving faith is heart-felt faith.

He continues, "Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.*"

There's only one God. Idols are nothing but chunks of wood or stone. "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us *there is one God, the Father, of whom are all*

things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are all things, and through whom we live.*” Other deities don’t exist, but even if they did, our Father God and the Lord Jesus Christ would reign supreme. *The Father created all things. Jesus sustains all things.* If pagan gods did exist, they would bow and obey the Christian God.

“However, *there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.*” In other words, *we're right with God through faith not food.*

A right relationship with God is won through the work of Christ, not our efforts. *Eat or don't eat...* our diet makes no difference in our standing before God.

Realize, just because Satan uses an object doesn't mean it's intrinsically evil. Satan inspires songs that promote evil and lead people astray. But the chords and instruments that make up the music are the same chords and instruments used to praise God.

An “*A Chord*” is a-moral in and of itself. It ends up good or evil depending on the motive behind its use.

The same is true with dancing, or fashion, or alcohol, or gambling - or a thousand other issues that cause controversy among Christians. Some issues aren't right or wrong, black or white - **they're gray matters!**

In 1928, Donald Barnhouse spoke at a Bible conference attended by 200 young people and some prudish counselors. One afternoon, an older women approached Barnhouse about an "appalling, sinful, wicked" practice going on among the girls at the camp.

You won't believe this, but they were walking around the camp in front of the boys *with no stockings*. These petty old ladies wanted the good preacher to rebuke this supposed "*spirit of compromise*" in the church.

Dr. Barnhouse writes about the incident, "Looking them straight in the eye, I said, 'The Virgin Mary never wore stockings.' They gasped and said, 'She didn't?' I answered, 'In Mary's time, stockings were unknown. So far as we know, they were first worn by prostitutes in Italy in the 15th century..." His answer immediately stifled their protest and made them rethink the issue.

A Christian from America may take offense when his German brother drinks a beer. While the German may be appalled when an American sister wears a two-piece swimsuit on the beach. I've known Christians who'd never feel right about wearing shorts to church, but don't mind lighting up a cigarette after the service.

Like meat sacrificed to idols, cultural taboos are a moving target. They change from place to place, from tribe to tribe, and from generation to generation.

Remember meat is nothing but meat. It's the attitude behind the use of it that varies from conscience to conscience. My conscience is not your master - nor is your conscience mine.

Jesus is the only Master, and we all should follow His Spirit in these gray matters.

I love what Mark Twain once said, "The trouble with the world is not that people know too little, but they know so many things that ain't so." And this applies to church. Too many folks have been trained by legalism.

People-imposed rules govern their conscience.

Rather than love God and love people - be led by the Holy Spirit - do what glorifies God... it's easier to just follow orders. Paul doesn't encourage the Corinthians to violate their conscience. He wants them to retrain it so it's no longer governed by tradition, but by truth.

Verse 9, "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?"

Remember verse 1, "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies..." *We should be living by love not legalism. But we should also be living by true love, not a reckless version of Christian liberty.* Logically, you know that meat is just meat. But to a younger Christian with a weaker faith, what he eats may still be at issue.

Logic shouldn't be our only guide. What about *love*?

You and I can become so right we become wrong. If we insist on our liberty knowing it'll lead a brother astray - what was right for us, has become a sin to him.

It might be fine for you to drink a glass of wine or go dancing, or listen to certain types of secular music...

You've grown in Christ. You've gained some discernment and self-control. But what you're doing might lead a weaker believer down the wrong path.

If so, it's a sin for you to take that risk. **If what you do harms a brother; then love says "Don't do it!"** More important than **making a point - is winning a brother.**

Paul agrees with this in verse 12, **"But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ."** He writes, **"Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."**

Notice, the extent to which *love* takes Paul. **He'll never again eat meat... imagine, steak, barbecue pork, beef brisket, juicy ribs...** Paul is prepared to give it all up for the faith of another believer. Do you really want to *stumble* a person, Christ died to make *stand*? To sin against a weaker brother is to sin against Christ!

Chapter 9 continues the discussion about liberty but on a different topic. Paul points to how he curtailed his freedom to keep the Corinthians from stumbling.

He begins, **"Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"** Here, and in Acts 1:21, we learn

that one of the requirements for being an apostle was being an eye-witness of the risen Christ. Paul met Jesus on the Road to Damascus!

He continues, “Are you not my work in the Lord? 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 Corinthian church was also evidence of Paul’s apostleship. A thriving church was born in an evil city. It was proof that God’s hand was on Paul’s ministry.

Verse 3, “My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?”

An apostolic perk was food and lodging from the host church - even certain travel benefits. An apostle could travel with his wife. This was how “Cephas” or Peter rolled. And Paul could’ve demanded similar treatment, it was his apostolic right; instead he refused to take advantage of his rights. He kept a low profile.

And verse 3 is a really big problem for Roman Catholics who teach that Peter was the first pope. If he was; then you’ve got a *married pope*. Pete had a wife.

Which reminds me of the newspaper tycoon who had three sons. He wanted to select one son to be his successor, but he wasn't sure which son would make the best newspaper man, so he proposed a test.

He asked each boy to come up with the most shocking, sensational three word headline possible.

The first son composed his headline, "Biden Turns Republican." That was sensational, but the second son bested him. His read, "Ayatollah Becomes Jewish." But it was the third son who won the prize. His headline had just two words, "Pope Elopes." *That's over the top!*

Paul's point is that as an apostle he had certain rights he willingly forfeited. Other apostles were married and traveled with their wife. Paul stayed single.

He writes in verse 6, "Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?"

Here's another right he forfeited due to his love for the Corinthians. From its earliest days, the Church supported its leaders financially, so they could devote themselves to full-time ministry. Paul was entitled to such support, but in Corinth he waived the privilege.

Acts 18:3 tells us while there, he lodged with Aquila and Priscilla and helped make ends meet by working with them in their tent-making business. His intent was not to be a financial burden on the Corinthians. *But here he questions of the wisdom of this strategy...*

Verse 7, "Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?" Paul's strategy to work a secular job to support himself financially had not been optimal ministry-wise.

He mentions a **soldier, a vinedresser, a farmer.**

Soldiers should be supported by the people they help to defend. If a soldier in battle is worried about his family back

home - whether they're starving, or getting evicted - how can he stay focused on the fight? A *distracted soldier* is a *defeated soldier*. He's better on the *battlefront*, if he's not worried about the *home front*.

And Paul's point is the same for a pastor. How can he give himself fully to the study of God's Word and prayer for the people if his own needs aren't met.

Paul also says, you won't find a thirsty vinedresser, or a dairy farmer with brittle bones. The vinedresser is drinking from his vineyard, and the farmer is drinking milk from his own cows. Likewise, a pastor should be supported from the finances taken by his own ministry.

No pastor should draw an exorbitant salary.

But neither should a pastor make the minimum. Many churches pray, "Lord, you keep him humble, and we'll keep him poor." A church with that attitude may just get what they pay for! Paul is rebuking the Corinthians. They need to pony up and pay the pastor.

Verse 8, "Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses..." Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 - a verse you wouldn't associate with paying the pastor.

Apparently, the Holy Spirit's application of Scripture can be quite broad. Here's Deuteronomy 25:4, "*You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.*"

A good farmer allows his ox to munch the grain as he threshes. A weak ox is worthless! Paul says just as feeding

the ox is an expense of the harvest, supporting the pastor is an expense of the spiritual harvest.

Paul concludes his commentary on Deuteronomy, “Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.” It’s every worker’s hope to get paid a wage commiserate with his contribution. The same is true for a pastor. Years ago, we had a fellow who suggested capping my salary. I resisted. Not because I wanted *a lot of money*, but because I knew I needed *a lot of hope*. *Why kill a man’s incentive to work hard?*

I told the elders, “Please, you can raise my salary or cut my salary, but don’t ever put me in a situation where there’s nothing I can do about my salary.”

That produces a hopeless worker and pastor. Paul understood men and pastors - and what motivates both. He says, “*he who plows should plow in hope.*”

Verse 11, “If we have sown spiritual things for you, *is it a great thing if we reap your material things?*”

Here’s an important spiritual principle. If a pastor helps you spiritually, you should support him materially.

If a church is adding to your life spiritually and helping you focus eternally, then it’s a small trade-off for you to help that church pay a few of its bills.

And if this applies to all pastors, it certainly applied to Paul in his dealings with the Corinthians. “If others are partakers

of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.”

Paul had founded this church. He was the pastor most entitled to a salary. But he had laid aside his rights lest someone accuse him of selfish motives.

Realize, Paul was not above accepting a church's financial help. On other occasions, he gladly received such support, *just not in Corinth*. Perhaps, the Corinthians were suspicious of *crooked clergy*. Maybe they'd been burned by another pastor. Paul wanted them to know he cared about *their soul*, not *money*.

And this is how Calvary Chapel has patterned our approach to money. Sure, we have needs. *Don't think the power company donates electricity to the church...*

I think we would be well within our God-ordained right to be bolder in our comments about giving, but for 38 years we've waived those rights. I realize how often in the past the appeal for money has been abused, and folks have been manipulated. Thus, for the sake of the Gospel, we're a church that has limited our appeals.

CC exists to meet your needs, not the other way around. We believe God will take care of His church if we're faithful to the ministry He has given us.

Verse 13, “*Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?*” When an OT worshipper brought his animal to the altar, the priest who

administered the sacrifice got a choice cut of meat. He was paid in beef.

The OT priest was supported by the worshippers.

“Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”

And what was true of the OT priests should also be true with NT pastors. The pastor should be paid from the monetary sacrifices offered to God and His work.

Verse 15, “But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it *would be* better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.”

Paul would rather have died than run the risk of anyone casting him as a money-hungry preacher.

It reminds me of Billy Graham. Early in his ministry, after a crusade here in Atlanta, a newspaper ran a photo of Billy leaving the stadium with bags of money. He was innocent of any wrong doing, but it looked bad.

From that day onward, he separated himself from the money. He adopted a modest salary and set up strict guidelines for how others should handle the ministry's finances. He wanted everything to not just be above board, but appear above board. He eliminated any appearance of impropriety. This should be our attitude!

He says in verse 16, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”

I tell young men who come to me wanting to be pastors, "If you can do anything else in the world other than pastor - and be happy doing it - then don't pastor."

Being a pastor isn't just a career move. It should be the passion of a man's heart. It's a calling from God.

Paul had no choice in the matter. Being a pastor was laid on Paul *of necessity*. Woe to him if he didn't preach the Gospel. Paul would've been *successful* at whatever he did - *but satisfied?* I doubt it! God called Paul to preach, and he would be happy doing nothing else.

"For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel." The ministry wasn't a job to Paul. He never served for a paycheck. The ministry was *a stewardship - a divine responsibility* - to Paul.

His reward was not charging the people he served, a dime for his service. He never abused his authority.

Once, I was watching a television special on the first 50 years of the NBA. One of the Old-timers said, "The team owners were the dumbest people on earth. They paid us a salary, but they didn't have to - we would've played for free." They played for the love of the game.

And this is how I feel about being your pastor.

Don't misunderstand, I appreciate my salary - *and you're being biblical for paying me* - but I've said this for the last 38

years, *"If you guys didn't pay me to pastor this church, I'd pay you for the opportunity."*

"Pastor" is the most demanding, taxing, challenging, intense job I know. But I wouldn't trade it for any other post in the world. I thank God daily for the opportunity to communicate His Word and to pastor His people.

Verse 19, *"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more..."* Paul's freedom in Christ was far-reaching - *he was free from the Law, free to eat meat, free from money. He was also free from the opinions of men.*

Paul didn't care one iota about what people thought of him. His only desire was the Lord's approval!

But he did care about what people thought of Jesus, and the Gospel. He was an ambassador for Christ.

His goal was to lead people to Jesus. This is why he was always building bridges to different people groups.

He elaborates on his strategy in verse 20, *"and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*

Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you." Paul was *faithful and flexible.*

If his audience were Jews, he would observe Jewish customs. He ate kosher food and kept the Sabbath. It wasn't the time or place to flaunt his freedom. Why try to prove a point and lose a soul who needs Jesus?

But while speaking to Gentiles, he downplayed his Jewishness and extolled his freedom. Paul knew if he could *fit in*, he would be better positioned to *speak up*.

Obviously, we're not talking about compromising on moral, or ethical, or spiritual, or biblical values. Paul was pointing out that he adapted to the culture at hand.

Most likely, the biker will win the biker to Jesus - the salesman will win the salesman - the housewife will win the housewife. Paul identified with the person or persons he wanted to reach. He understood their culture, and found common ground and built a bridge.

Traditionally, the church has approached prevailing culture in two ways: **isolation** or **imitation**. We either **separate** or **integrate**. But a third option is **infiltrate!** Paul became all things to all men in order to win some!

I've had some church folks say, "**I just can't stand your loud rock-and-roll music.**" *Okay, but don't grumble when young people no longer come to your church.*

What do you want? A cozy environment for the *dignified and sanctified* - or a place where lost people can relate to the Gospel? An expert on evangelism, **Donald McGraven**, once said, "**The world has more winnable people than ever before... but it's possible to come out of a ripe field empty-handed.**" That's what's happening today. The world is hungry

for the Gospel, but the Church doesn't present it in a compelling way.

When Hudson Taylor landed in mainland China, he struggled in his efforts to spread the Gospel. One day, the Lord told him to give up his Western clothes and customs - dress like the Chinese. He even cut his hair.

This offended his fellow western missionaries, but it built a bridge to the locals that yielded a great spiritual harvest. *He didn't go to China to reach missionaries.*

The founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, once said, "I would stand on my head, and play a tambourine with my feet if I thought it would help me win one lost soul to Jesus." That's how I feel. I'll try anything - other than sin - if it'll help me reach a person or peoples for Jesus. *I'd even get a tattoo... maybe!*

Chapter 9 ends with a trip to the stadium. Corinth was the site of the Isthmian Games. At the time, the competition in Corinth eclipsed the Olympics in Athens.

The Greek peninsula was a hotbed for athletics.

And Paul was a sports buff. He had tickets. He watched the games. And in verse 24, he compares the Christian life to an athletic contest. "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it."

Over forty years ago, US Olympic coach, Brutus Hamilton, compiled a list of what he thought would be the ultimate

achievements in track-and-field. He listed what he thought were the limits of human endeavor.

No one would ever run a 9.2 second 100 yard dash, or a 3 minute 57 second mile, or throw a shot put more than 62 feet, or high jump more than 7'1", or long jump 27 feet, or pole vault more than 16 feet. Today, everyone of these barriers has been shattered.

And spiritually speaking, you too can *go higher, last longer, and be stronger* than you once thought possible. All that holds you back is a lack of faith.

Paul tells the Corinthians to stop toying with their faith. Get serious. Be determined. Don't give up the first time you get knocked down... This past NFL season, Ezekiel Elliot, a Dallas Cowboy, rushed for more yards than any other running back, 1,434 yards.

But what you don't realize is Elliot got knocked down every 4.7 yards, and had to get back up and do it again 304 times. His total yardage didn't come easy.

Nothing of any real value in this life comes easy. If you want to rack up some yards for Jesus and score a few touchdowns, your faith needs to toughen up.

“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.”

When an athlete is training for an event, there are foods he won't eat and activities in which he won't participate. A training regiment requires discipline.

And the Greek athlete did it for a flimsy wreath.

Whereas, a Christian is after eternal rewards. How much more determined should a believer be...

“Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty.

Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air.

But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” The phrase translated “*discipline my body,*” literally reads, “*I blacken my eye.*” Paul uses severe measures in his training. He pushes his body.

He does whatever it takes to make his body do what it doesn't want to do. And the Christian needs this kind of mindset... The difference for the Christian is that we have it in our heart to obey. We discipline our bodies to make them do what we really want them to do.

Jesus transforms our heart, but we train our bodies.

And this stringent effort is required because so much is at stake. Paul worries that he could disqualify himself from the ministry. He says, “*that after I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*”

Paul imagines a scenario where his soul is saved, but his life is wasted. He's rendered unusable. What a tragedy. We should all fear this outcome... Let's not do anything stupid that would limit our usefulness.