



freedom

1 Corinthians 8-11

SCPC term 3 2008

sunday 3rd august 2008

study 2 FREE TO SERVE 1 Corinthians 9:1-18

KEY VERSE FOR SERIES: "nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" 1 Corinthians 10:24

Sometimes I wish I could read bits of the bible for the first time again so that I could come to them fresh and feel their full impact. This is an incredible passage with a real twist in the tail. Even being familiar with it you can't help but feel the Corinthians being drawn in by Paul's outlining of his many apostolic rights in the first 11 and-a-half verses only to be WHACKED with a real sucker punch in 12b—"but we did not use this right"!!!! And Why...? "we would put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ".

In this passage Paul shows himself to be a living example of the sort of gospel-driven love described in chapter 8. After presenting his considerable resume, Paul goes on to explain to the Corinthians that he has elected not to use his rights/freedoms to earn a living from his gospel work. In so doing, he distinguishes himself from those who might be preaching out of selfish motives rather than out of love.

some notes on questions

Q1. It's not JUST about money (Paul is also picking up on issues of marriage and eating certain foods discussed in chapters 7-8) but it IS about money. Paul defends himself not to make himself look good but so that the Corinthians clearly understand his rights as an apostle in order that they understand his motivation in laying aside those rights.

Q2. This is such a great twist. It sounds in verses 1-12a that Paul is going to demand payment but he ends up doing the exact opposite! How it must have taken the wind out of his opponents sails!

Q3. Paul is exemplifying the fact that Christian freedom is not an end in itself. It isn't freedom to do whatever we want or whatever is permissible. It's freedom to serve God and his gospel. Paul's actions are a real rebuke to anyone who (ab)uses their freedom as an excuse for selfishness.

Q5. It seems that Paul considers it a greater privilege to preach the gospel voluntarily (unpaid) than in a paid capacity. The logic is not completely obvious to me I must confess but v18 seems to suggest that Paul simply delights in being able to offer the gospel of God's free grace free of charge. Which sounds fair enough to me!

Q6-9. Try to get both personal and specific as you think and apply God's word. As with last week, our context is very different and no one in your groups is in anything like Paul's position (as far as I know we haven't got any apostles in our midst!) but there are some very obvious challenges here to our way of thinking: do we share Paul's enthusiasm for the progress of the gospel, and what rights/freedoms are we giving up so that nothing would hinder it?