Principles Of Christian Liberty – Part 2

1 Corinthians 9

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First Corinthians chapters 8, 9, and 10 are all dealing with the same subject. It's pretty simple to introduce the setting of the text. Beginning in chapter 8, last week we saw that Paul was answering a question that was asked him of the believers in Corinth about eating meat offered to idols. Now, when you hear that you think, What's the big deal? We don't worry about meat offered to idols, but Paul in answering them basically gave to us principles, underline the word "principles," that deal with Christian liberty.

There are things that aren't black or white in the Bible but Christians sometimes disagree as to whether they should be doing them or not doing them; are they right, are they wrong; and we have to apply these principles of liberty to be able to know whether or not we should partake of something or be engaged in a certain activity. We don't want to be legalists, we don't want to be under law and relate to God only on rules and regulations, but we don't want to have this license either that says, "I'm under grace, and I can do whatever I want. It doesn't matter how my actions affect other people," and that's a dangerous thing, too, so we want to walk, " . . . in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." We don't want to stumble other people.

Actually, if you peek at the last verse of chapter 8, Paul says, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." Paul says, "If meat will offend someone else or cause them to stumble," the word "offend" is the word skandalíz Òà It means to stumble or fall. He says, "I'm not going to eat meat at all. I'm not going to do anything that would cause someone else to stumble." We might have the knowledge, Paul said, that meat is nothing and an idol is nothing—no big deal, just go ahead and partake—but if another brother or sister who is weaker in the faith or is stumbled by that, then I'm not walking in love. I'm not being considerate of the other brother or sister, and I could by my actions cause them to stumble and fall. Paul is basically telling us that we should walk in love—liberty controlled by love. I know it's okay. I know there's nothing wrong with it, but I want to be walking in love toward others that are around me.

We move to 1 Corinthians 9, and again we're still dealing with the same subject, but Paul shifts the focus to himself and to his ministry. A lot of this chapter is using his life—his ministry as an apostle, as a preacher of the gospel, as a minister—to relate to the fact that he gave up his rights and his privilege in order to win other people, not to stumble them. We get a lot of insight to Paul and his ministry and what it means to be a minster of the gospel as Paul describes himself as being one who set aside his liberties and his privileges for the sake of others. You need to ask yourself tonight, "What am I doing to set aside a privilege or liberty for the sake of someone else, that they might benefit?"

There are three sections to this chapter that I want to outline for you. We'll take them one at a time. The first is verses 1-14 where Paul is actually talking about unclaimed rights or freedoms

that he had—freedoms, liberties he had that he did not partake of or claim for himself. The first six verses is dealing with his being an apostle. Let's look at this first. Just let me say this real quick, Paul's apostleship was actually under attack by some false teachers in Corinth. Wherever Paul went, there were false teachers who tried to attack him and say that he was not an apostle, so Paul is going to be dealing with that a bit as well, and I'll bring out some more as to that specific issue. Paul's mentioning himself and his apostleship because he was being attacked, and they wanted to undermine his authority and the gospel that he preached. A lot of times the devil will use those to attack the true preacher of the word of God to try to undermine the authority of the Scriptures that they preach.

Start with me, verses 1-6, Paul says, "Am I not an apostle?"—he just jumps right into it with both feet—"am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? 2 If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. 3 Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, 4 Have we not"—he's not talking about him and other apostles, and he's going to talk about the liberty that they had to have a wife—"power to eat and to drink? 5 Have we not power"—the word "power" means a right or privilege or authority—"to lead about a sister,"—who is actually a reference to a wife—"as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?"—Peter. Just a quick footnote, I'll come back to it, Peter had a wife. So, if Peter was the first Pope, the Pope was married. This is Peter having a wife.

Verse 6, "Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power"—or right or authority or privilege—"to forbear working?" As I said, Paul was defending his apostleship and using his ministry as an apostle and as a preacher to show that there were certain things that he could do that were legitimate and kosher—they were okay, they weren't wrong—but he did actually forego that. He set it aside in order to be a blessing to reach other people and not stumble them.

Go back with me to verse 1, "Am I not an apostle? am I not free?" You're going to see a bunch of question marks there in verse 1, and then another one, verse 6, and then another one, verse 7, another in verses 8, 9. All these question marks are rhetorical questions expecting a yes answer. He's using rhetorical speech and expecting a yes answer to his questions. "Am I not an apostle?"—what's the answer? Yes—"am I not free?"—answer? Yes, you're free to eat meat offered to idols, you're free to marry a wife, you're free to minister without working and be supported. So, "am I not free?"—the answer is yes.

Notice what he says in verse 1, " . . . have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"—answer? Yes—"are not ye my work in the Lord?" As I said, he jumps into it with both feet. In the first verse Paul says, "I am an apostle. I am free. I've seen the Lord Jesus Christ." This was one of the qualifications for apostleship, verse 1, having seen the risen Jesus Christ, having seen the Lord and experienced Him. Some argue and say that Paul did not see the Lord Jesus Christ, but Paul actually is alluding to the Damascus Road experience. In Acts 9 when he was known as Saul of Tarsus, he's on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians with authority from the leadership in Jerusalem, and on his way there the Lord appeared to him. It was high noon, but there was a bright light, brighter than the sun, and he was struck down to the earth. He heard

an audible voice from heaven say, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Saul said, “Who art thou, Lord?”—that I may worship You or follow You, and the voice came back—“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”

Can you imagine what a mind-blowing experience that would be? You’re on your way to Damascus to arrest Christians and throw them into jail, have some of them put to death, and Jesus Christ strikes you down on the earth and says, “Why are you persecuting Me?” He actually said, “ . . . it is hard for thee to kick against the goads,”—the long pointed stick that they would use to poke into the oxen in the fields to goad them, to get them to move. I believe that that was the conviction of the Holy Spirit in Saul’s life who had actually watched Stephen the martyr die and said, “I see Jesus standing at the right hand of God the Father,” and he saw the Lord. So, he saw the angel face of Stephen and saw how he endured that stoning. No doubt, the Spirit of God was convicting Saul.

But that was when Saul was actually converted, and then he went into Damascus, Ananias came and laid hands on him, filled with the Holy Spirit, and he received his sight. He was struck blind and actually went blind into the city. He had to be led by hand, and then he was restored. He had to go out of the city secretly because the Jews were lying in wait to try to kill him for now he’s a Christian and he was preaching the gospel already of Jesus Christ. Paul had seen Christ.

There’s also other references in the book of Acts where Jesus Christ literally, personally, appeared to Paul—when he was on the ship going to Rome and the Lord appeared to him and said that the Lord would watch over him and take care of him. Then, in 2 Corinthians 12, Paul said that he was actually caught up into Paradise, or into heaven, third heaven, and saw and heard things that were unutterable. This guy had some great experiences. Can you imagine him in a testimony meeting, all the experiences that he had in encountering the Lord? This is one of the reasons why I don’t believe, and some people get upset with me when I say this, I don’t believe that there are today any apostles in this primary sense. You might be able to call yourself an apostle in that you’re sent out as a missionary, but certainly it has nothing to do with apostolic authority to write Scripture, so they had to have seen the risen Lord.

Anytime, as a matter of fact, I believe today when a pastor or minister claims apostolic authority, run for your life. They’re trying to usurp authority over you that’s not biblical and not scriptural, and there are no apostles today. They laid the foundation of the church. Jesus Christ is actually the foundation of the church, not any man; and no man today can speak with apostolic authority. The preacher’s only authority today is the Bible, the Word of God. He must be hiding behind the Scriptures. The Word of God is the authority, not the man who preaches the Word. The closer the preaching is to the true Word of God, the clearer the voice of God is.

Notice Paul actually says, also to you in Corinth, “ . . . are not ye my work in the Lord?”—you are my work in the Lord. So, you’re being influenced here in Corinth by false teachers that say Paul’s not an apostle, and he says, “Your salvation, your conversion, this church of Corinth is evidence of my apostolic ministry. You, yourself, are evidence of the ministry that I have as an

apostle." That being said, "If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord"—your salvation through my ministry is evidence that God has called me as an apostle. Verse 3, "Mine answer to them that do examine me is this."

Let me say something I find fascinating, and it'll become more evident as we go through the text, one of the things that they were accusing Paul of as not being an apostle, believe it or not, was that if Paul really were a minister and an apostle of God, he would allow us to financially support him, he would accept money from us. See, because Paul is going to be arguing in this chapter that one of the privileges and blessings that he had was that he could be financially and materially supported as an apostle, but he said no to that. He didn't want to hinder the preaching of the gospel. They're actually saying, "The reason Paul does not take money for his preaching is because he knows in his heart he's not really an apostle." Think about that! That's insane. Today it's more often people say, "Well, all he does is ask for money, so he's not a real minister of Jesus Christ." You're not to be preaching, " . . . for filthy lucre sake," and certainly Paul was not guilty of that. They were actually saying, "He knows in his heart he's not really an apostle and that's why he won't take support financially." So, he says, "Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, 4 Have we not power to eat and to drink?"—in other words, you should be taking care of us, you should be feeding us and giving us something to drink.

Verse 5, Paul said, "Have we not power to lead about a sister,"—it's really quite simple, Paul is basically saying, 'If I wanted to have a wife, I could have a wife.' It's evident from what Paul says here that he was either a widower or he was a bachelor, so he did not have a wife. He's saying, "If I wanted to have a wife, it'd be okay for me to have a wife." " . . . a wife, as well as other apostles,"—I want you to see that, verse 5, other apostles had wives, and then there were—"the brethren of the Lord"—probably James and John—"and Cephas?"—Peter there is, of course, Simon Peter.

Verse 6, "Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?"—are we the only ones that don't have the right to go without working and that you should support us? Again, it's interesting that the Bible says that false teachers will come in the last days saying that you should not marry, they will be forbidding to marry. There's absolutely no biblical support at all scripturally for saying that a minister of the gospel and sadly, in the Roman Catholic Church, a priest or a Pope, cannot be married or have a wife. Actually, the New Testament indicates that there'll be false teachers who'll be forbidding to marry and to abstain from certain kinds of meats. It's interesting that we see here that Paul's arguing other apostles, even Peter, had a wife, and it would be okay if I had a wife. The Bible says, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the LORD." I thank God that I have a wife, and my wife is a good thing. She's a blessing, and I praise God for her. Paul says, "Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?"—to go without working.

Verses 7-10, Paul actually says that in human experience, that in the world this is consistent that if you go to warfare, if you plant a vineyard, if you're a shepherd and have a flock, you should be able to eat of your flock. If you're an ox treading corn, you should be able to eat of

the corn. All of this is basically for one thing, to argue that he could be financially and materially supported in the ministry. Verse 7, he says, “Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?”—again, question mark. “Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? 8 Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?” So, am I just speaking as a human being off the top of my head or is not the Scriptures actually say also the law.

Verse 9, “For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?”—the answer is yes, and it’s an argument from the lesser to the greater—if God takes care of oxen, then God’s going to take care of his ministers.

Verse 10, “Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.” Go back with me for just a moment to verse 7. He uses three analogies: that of going to war, that of planting a vineyard as a vinedresser or a farmer, and that of feeding the flock as a shepherd. He’s basically saying, without even going to Scripture yet, and he’s going to go to Scripture quoting Moses, but he’s basically going to the real world around us saying, “You know, if you’re going into the Army to serve as a soldier, you don’t have to buy your own tank. You don’t have to buy your own boots. You don’t have to buy your own rifle.” Some people today will go into the military in order to be fed, in order to be housed, in order to be taken care of.

Can you imagine these soldiers that are being sent to Iran right now and told they have to get their own aircraft carrier? They’ve got to buy it themselves? Or you have to buy your own helicopter or your own jet? You have to provide your own weapons? That’s ludicrous. Not only that, they give you free haircuts in the Army. They take care of you. They give you a place to sleep, a clean bed. They tell you where to go and when to go and what you do, but they take care of you. So, if you’re hungry, you need a place to sleep, join the Army. Join the Marines. Join the Navy. Do something. He’s basically saying in the real world out there, you don’t go to warfare at your own charges, “Yeah, we want you to drive a tank, but you’re going to have to buy it yourself.” I don’t think so.

What about planting a vineyard, verse 7? If you plant a vineyard and you work hard and grow a vineyard, should you not be able to eat the grapes? What is the answer? Yes! You plant a garden in your backyard, shouldn’t you be able to eat of your own vegetables? So, the minister sows the seed, it brings forth fruit, he should be able to be partaker of the vineyard. All these pictures, by the way, speak of no doubt the church and the ministry that we have in the church is a spiritual battle, a warfare, and it’s like growing a vineyard and bearing fruit.

Then he says, “ . . . or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?” If you have a flock of sheep, do you not get to have the wool? If you have goats, do you not get to drink the goat milk? He’s basically just arguing from this point of, “I have every right to be supported, to be taken care of, but I set it aside. I voluntarily, lovingly, benevolently set it aside for the sake of

others that I might minister to them and I might help them." It's so very important.

Now he turns to Scripture, verse 9, "For it is written,"—he's quoting from Deuteronomy 25—"in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care of oxen?" If you're taking notes, write down Deuteronomy 25:4. "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?"—the answer is yes.

Verse 10, "Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope." Basically, the Scripture there from Deuteronomy, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn," is basically the idea that when the ox would be threshing the corn or treading the corn, you're not to muzzle that ox. He's to be able to reach down and to eat that corn at his will. So, if you're working at the pizza parlor and you make pizzas, you should be able to have a pizza. If you work at In-N-Out, you should be able to have a double-double on the house. Just take this text to your boss and read it to them, "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." "I make pizzas. I make hamburgers. I'm a delivery guy, so I can eat some of it myself." That's kind of where you can apply it.

Notice he begins to speak about his ministry, verses 11-14, and as a minister how he gave up his rights. He says, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? 12 If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless"—here's the application—"we have not used this power"—this right or liberty—"but suffer all things,"—or we endure all things—"lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ." That verse, verse 12, is actually a very important key text, a very important key text. You might want to highlight it, note it, or underline it. He's applying what he's taught thus far, " . . . we have not used this power"—privilege or right or liberty—"but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ." Paul's goal and motive and purpose was, "I don't want to hinder the gospel of Christ." That's the reason he did that.

Verse 13, "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?" Paul's using analogy of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, and he's saying that when the priest offers sacrifices in the temple, they're allowed to take certain portions of the animal that was sacrificed and barbecued there on the altar and bring it home to their family to eat. Now, you can imagine, your dad's the priest, and you love lamb chops, you love leg of lamb or you love barbecued lamb, and, "Man, this is great! Dad's coming home from working at the temple, and he's bringing a lamb. We're going to have barbecued lamb for dinner tonight," and they're jumping up and down when the kids see daddy coming in the driveway on his donkey. " . . . and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?

Verse 14, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Stop right there. As a minister of the gospel, those who preach the gospel, he's arguing for the idea that it's biblical and scriptural and perfectly legitimate for them to be

supported and taken care of by the church or the people that they minister to. There's nothing wrong with that.

Secondly, notice what Paul says in verses 15-23. This is the second main division. He gives the reasons that he did not use his rights. He says, "But I have used none of these things"—what things? The idea that I can be supported, that I could have a wife, that I could be taken care of, that I can eat and drink, and I should be provided for. He said, "But I have used none of these things." We know that Paul actually was a tent maker and that he worked, laboring night and day, with his own hands to support himself and the others who were with him in ministry, and he wouldn't take an offering. " . . . neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void."

The first reason that Paul said, "I do what I do," is that ministry to others is a privilege, verse 15. This is where the rubber meets the road, and we could draw some really important applications in the area of serving the Lord and ministering. You may not be a full-time supported minister of the gospel, but you should still have the right heart and same attitude that anyone would have in ministry. Ministry to others, sacrificing for others, giving up liberties for the sake of others is a privilege. It is a privilege. Don't forget, ministry is a privilege.

In verses 16-17, Paul points out that it's also a responsibility to minister to others, "For though I preach the gospel,"—and Paul did indeed do that—"I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" It's a privilege and I have a responsibility to minister to others because God has called me, and I must be obedient to the call of God and the gifting of God. I love what Paul says in verse 16, this is especially applicable to ministers of the gospel today, "I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of"—I can't take any credit or glory for it—"for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"

No minister of the gospel should ever do it for money. Should it be supported? Yes, but you're not doing it for money. You're not doing it for gain. You're not doing it for a salary. You're doing it whether you get paid or not, you're doing it actually because you're called of God and commissioned by God. If you're motivated by money, then you're in the wrong business. You have to have a call of God on your life, and your motive is not to be paid or not money. It should be true of every pastor that is a preacher of the gospel. It should be a calling, and it should be that if you don't preach the gospel, woe is me!

What is the gospel? The gospel is Jesus " . . . Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,"—1 Corinthians 15—"And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." The gospel is all about Jesus—who He is, what He's done, His Person and work. It centers in Christ who came from heaven, died on the cross, buried, rose from the dead, and is the Savior of the world; and we must put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

First, it's a privilege to minister to others. Secondly, it's a responsibility, " . . . woe is unto me, if I

preach not the gospel!" It's happened quite often that a pastor who is genuinely called to the gospel might get a little discouraged sometimes, in the work not of the work, and say, "Lord, can I please just drive a truck. Can I please just swing a hammer. Can I please just dig a ditch. Can I please just do something else?" Again, he finally says, " . . . woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" It's that which compels them. It's not the need in front of them, it's the call of God behind them.

Verse 17, "For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward,"—it must be done willingly, so it is a responsibility that we willingly do because we're wanting to be good stewards of the gospel that God has entrusted to us knowing that we will give an account to God, who has called us to preach. " . . . but if against my will, a dispensation"—it could also be translated stewardship—"of the gospel is committed unto me." Such important foundational truths for ministers of the gospel.

Verse 18, Paul again says that one of the reasons I forego these privileges is because I want to get a reward from heaven, not on earth. I want to get my reward from heaven. He's motivated by a desire for a reward. He says, "What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel." Notice, " . . . I preach the gospel"—and my reward is that I do it without charge, and that I am going to get my reward from heaven. You know, whether you're a full-time minister of the gospel or you're just a lay leader or lay preacher or lay Bible teacher, or just an evangelist at heart that God's using you, you're doing it not for earthly rewards, you're doing it for heavenly rewards. You're doing it to be able to hear one day the Lord say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." It's so very, very, very important.

Verses 19-23, Paul says that he loved sinners and wanted to see them saved. This is what motivated him to forego some of his rights and liberties for the sake of others. He says, "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." Again, this is the heart of a true minister. This is a heart of a true servant, "I be free from all men, yet have I"—become a slave to them. I became a servant to them in order—" . . . that I might gain the more. 20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law." This doesn't mean that Paul became Jewish in his practice, it just means that he was flexible, and if he needed to take a Jewish vow or shave his head to go into the temple, identify with Jews to reach them, he would do that. He wanted to become " . . . all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

Be careful that you don't misunderstand this, either. We don't want to sin in order to reach sinners. You don't want to go into a bar and start drinking alcohol because you want to relate to people that drink alcohol in the bar. You don't want to go to your friend's house who smokes pot because I'm going to smoke pot and tell them about Jesus and win them to Christ. You can't " . . . do evil, that good may come"—you don't want to sin that good may come. But you want to use your liberty, if possible, to be able to become " . . . all things to all men," for the purpose of

gaining the more. You want to use that for the gospel's sake and for reaching other people.

So, "To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law." He was still living under grace. He was still committed to God's Word. He was still committed to Christ, "that I might gain them that are without law. 22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." That's the reason. Verse 23, "And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you." So, I want to share in the good work that God wants to do in your life, and I do it for the gospel's sake.

The last, and third division, verses 24-27, Paul's exhortation. Here he basically wraps it all up and applies it. Verse 24, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

Paul closes with this analogy of running a race in verse 24. When they run a race, everyone runs, " . . . but one receiveth the prize." It's believed, and I think rightfully so, that Paul's alluding to what is known as the Isthmian Games, not the Greek Olympic Games in Rome but in Corinth, which was on a little isthmus or kind of a narrow little island of land. They had these athletic contests that were second only to the Greek Olympics. They were called the Isthmian Games.

In the Isthmian Games, only freemen could compete, and they had to come early to the competition for about a month and had to go on a certain diet. They had to work really hard physically training and prepping. The would do several different things. They would do running, boxing, and other athletic events; but quite often in the Bible Paul uses the picture of running a race and boxing. He uses those both in this closing section. But in the Isthmian Games they " . . . run all, but one receiveth the prize," so we as God's servants, we as apostles, we as ministers, we are running a race. We want to run to win, right? We don't run just to run, we run to win. In the Isthmian Games, when they would run a race, only one person could win that race; and Paul says, we can all run to win. As believers, we all run the race in order that we might win the race that we're running. We run to win the race. All of us as believers have the opportunity to win the race.

Verse 25, "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." Basically, it's a way of saying that if you're going to be an athlete, if you're going to run a race, if you're going to be in a boxing match, you'd better practice and prepare and discipline your body. So, you strive " . . . for the mastery is temperate in all things." These athletes that go on rigid diets in order to just get their bodies prepped and fit for running the race, they train very hard. "Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible"—crown.

He's contrasting the two rewards. Their crown was a laurel wreath, a little bunch of ivy put on their head, and it would wither and go away after a couple of days. They were honored. They were respected. Their families were recognized. They were heroes, but they would have a little laurel wreath just put on their head. At least, today in the Olympics, an athlete, if he gets gold, silver, or bronze has something of value. It weighs and has value. " . . . but we"—verse 25, we're doing what we do, serving the Lord, running the race, saying no to certain bodily appetites and pleasures that we could have, we do it for an incorruptible crown. The Bible says, " . . . that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." So, we're doing it for eternal rewards, a crown " . . . that fadeth not away."

Paul says, here it is verse 26, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air"—that's where he switches and uses the imagery of boxing there. I don't just shadow box. I'm not just beating the air. I run with certainty. I fight as not one that's just beating the air. Verse 27, he says, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." This whole chapter is all about Paul's ministry as an apostle and as a preacher of the gospel basically saying that he gives up a lot of his liberties and his blessings in order to be a blessing to others that he might reach them with the gospel. So, " . . . when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

This "preaching to others" and becoming "a castaway," is not in context by any means talking about losing one's salvation—disciplining my body, not falling into sin lest I lose my salvation. It's all talking about liberties as it relates to service. He's talking about liberties as it relates to service. He's basically saying, "Because I want to serve the Lord effectively, I want to serve the Lord benevolently. I want to serve the Lord graciously, a way that glorifies God. I want to be effective in my ministry. I've basically disciplined myself not to do certain things because I don't want to be put on the shelf. I don't want to become unusable.

How many ministers of the gospel, even of the last couple of years, it's been amazing to me how many prominent pastors and spiritual leaders have fallen and have become disqualified and are no longer serving the Lord. So, basically what he's saying is, "I want to stay in the race. I want to finish well. I want to get the reward. I want to hear the, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant,'" so I beat my body, I discipline my body. I don't do things that would be legitimate to do in order that I can be more effective for Christ. And, after " . . . I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"—or put on a shelf.

You can be used by God wonderfully, gifted by God amazingly, and fall into some besetting sin or using a liberty that could cause others to stumble and actually be put on the shelf and no longer be used. If God has called you, and God is using you, you don't want to do anything to hinder that. You want to be faithful to what God has called you to do. Amen? Let's pray.