

Bible Reading Plan

WEEK OF JULY 26, 2020

WEEKLY READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 8-12
PASSAGES REFERENCED: 1 CORINTHIANS 8-10

Sometimes as we look at passages in the Bible, it can be easy to take scriptures out of their context and lose the overall force of what the writer is trying to say. This is why we are looking at Chapters 8-10 together. While there are interesting things we can learn from the individual chapters, it is important that we do not lose the overall point of what Paul is saying. Put another way: we don't want to lose sight of the forest for the trees.

What is Paul telling us in these chapters? Basically, he is saying the kingdom of God is what is most important, not our "rights." And sometimes, we need to sacrifice our "rights" for the sake of the kingdom.

In Chapter 8, Paul said, "we have the right to eat anything we want, even food sacrificed to idols." But then he said, "but if what I eat is going to cause my brother to stumble because he thinks eating such food would be sinful, I'm not going to eat it. In fact, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to fall." (8:13)

Perhaps Paul anticipated the Corinthians' complaint: "But it's my right to eat it! Why should I give up my freedom for others?" Part of it, he answers in verse 12 by pointing out that if we cause a brother to fall, we are sinning. But then he points out to his own life. He says, "I have a lot of rights as an apostle of Christ, but I don't insist on them. I have the right to get married and take my wife with me on my missionary journeys, but I do not. I have the right to receive money from those to whom I preach the gospel. In fact, scripture, and Christ himself commands it." (9:1-14)

Why didn't he take advantage of these rights? Most probably because he was preaching to a lot of poor people and he didn't want to take their money knowing it might cause them hardship. Another possibility was that he didn't want anyone to accuse him of trying to profit from the gospel and taking advantage of those to whom he was preaching. All of these things would hinder the gospel.

At the end of chapter 9, Paul compared his willingness to sacrifice his rights for the sake of others to training for a race. Sometimes you have to give up what you like to do or eat so that you can be ready for the race you are going to run. And if you don't, you could lose out on the prize because you lived for yourself instead of Christ and His kingdom.

I love how Paul draws this section of scripture to a close in chapter 10, "'Everything is permissible,' but not everything is helpful. 'Everything is permissible,' but not everything builds up. No one should seek his own good, but the good of the other person." (10:23-24)

I recall a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is: 'What are you doing for others?'" Perhaps we might consider, "what am I willing not to do for the sake of others?" So, as we consider our "rights," the question we really need to ask ourselves is: "Who and what am I living for? Myself? Or God and His kingdom?"