BUILT DIFFERENT

LESSON TEN

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-3

Thomas Schreiner, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, shows how Paul defends his apostleship and his arguments for supporting apostolic payment, but ultimately how this serves Paul's larger argument.

1–2. In chapter 9 Paul presents himself as an example of a person who has rights—namely, the right to receive pay—but does not make use of the rights he has. To show that he has the right to receive pay, however, he must point to his apostolic office. As noted above, Paul's apostolic authority was not disputed by the Corinthians. His apostleship is featured since it functioned as an example for the Corinthians of not using the rights one has. Since the matter of rights is under consideration, Paul begins by reminding the Corinthians of his freedom, which, as the succeeding verses demonstrate, means his freedom to receive financial support. To put it another way: he is free from subjecting himself to manual labour. Paul goes on to remind the Corinthians of his role as an *apostle*. His freedom to receive support derives from his apostolic ministry to which he was commissioned.

His having seen *Jesus our Lord* confirms that Paul is truly an apostle, for Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and called him to be an apostle (cf. Acts 9:1–19; 22:1–21; 26:1–23; 1 Cor. 15:8; Gal. 1:1, 11–17). What also confirms Paul's apostleship is the conversion of the Corinthians themselves, for they represent his apostolic *work*. Paul 'planted' the church (1 Cor. 3:6), or, as he says in 1 Corinthians 3:10, he 'laid' the 'foundation' of the church, establishing it by proclaiming the gospel to the Corinthians. Others might not own Paul as an apostle, presumably because he did not establish the church in every locality. The Corinthians, however, surely acknowledge Paul as an apostle, for they are the *seal* (*sphragis*) of his apostolic ministry—that is, they authenticate, ratify and document that he is a true apostle. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:2, the Corinthians are his 'letter': they represent his apostolic credentials, showing definitively that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ.

3–4. Paul has reminded the Corinthians of his apostolic credentials, and along with apostolic credentials comes apostolic support. The *defence* in view here, then, relates to financial support, which is warranted since Paul is an apostle. The defence here does not relate in any particular way to the Corinthians, as if they were questioning Paul's apostolic authority. Paul communicates the defence for apostolic support which he gives to those who 'examine' (*anakrinousin*, csb) him (cf. 4:3–4). Paul begins the first of seven rhetorical questions which clearly demand a 'yes' answer to make his case. The defence here has to do with Paul's rights: *the right to food and drink*. The word *right* (*exousian*) links back to 8:9, where the knowers assert their '*right*' (*exousia*, csb) to eat food in an idol's temple, which is another indication that Paul introduces himself here as an example for the Corinthians. In speaking of the right to food and drink, Paul does not mean that he has a right to eat. Rather, he means that he has the right to financial support so that he is free to pursue his apostolic ministry.

5. The matter of Paul's rights as an apostle continues to be pursued with another rhetorical question whose answer is obvious. The we, as verse 6 indicates, also includes Barnabas (so also v. 4). The *right* (*exousian*) here is to bring a *believing wife* along in mission work. Apparently, this was the pattern with *the Lord's brothers and Cephas*. In Matthew 13:55 'James, Joseph, Simon and Judas' are named as the Lord's brothers (so also Mark 6:3). James is quite prominent in the New Testament (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12) and is probably the author of the epistle of James (Jas 1:1). We know nothing else about Jude, though he is probably the author of the epistle of Jude (Jude 1). The New Testament tells us nothing else about Simon and Joseph. We have a window here into early views of marriage, for apparently Cephas was married (see also Matt. 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38); thus marriage was not considered to be a deficiency or prohibition for ministry (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:3; Heb. 13:4). Cephas is mentioned earlier in the letter relative to the divisions in the church (1:12; 3:22). The *right* here should not be limited to the allowance of marriage; what Paul has in mind is the fact that many were supported financially along with their wives. If both a husband and wife deserve support, surely Paul and Barnabas deserved the same if they were to marry.

COMMENTARY NOTES

6. Paul pulls in Barnabas here, which suggests that Barnabas was also unmarried and did not always receive financial support. Barnabas was known for his generosity (Acts 4:36–37), his encouragement of others (Acts 9:27; 11:22–24; 15:36–39) and his ministry with Paul (Acts 13:1, 2, 7, 42, 43, 46, 50; 14:12, 14, 20; 15:2, 12, 35; Gal. 2:1, 9). There is no record of Barnabas visiting Corinth, but since he is mentioned without explanation he likely did so. Paul's purpose in mentioning him is to make the argument that if the brothers of the Lord and Cephas are supported financially, Paul and Barnabas certainly have the right to be supported as well.

7. Arguments for the right to receive financial support continue, with three rhetorical questions which address matters of everyday life. The first relates to those who serve as soldiers. No soldier has to supply his own provisions, for since he is fighting for the sake of his people, he is provided with food and drink. In the same way, those who serve in the gospel should be cared for financially by others. Second, it is unheard of that one would plant a *vineyard* and fail to *eat its grapes* (cf. Deut. 20:6). The very point of planting a vineyard is to partake of its produce. Third, those who expend the energy to shepherd a flock do so in order to *drink the milk* the flock produces. Paul's argument is that what applies in the natural sphere and in the ordinary affairs of life also applies to the spiritual sphere. Since people work in various spheres to obtain provisions to live, so those who proclaim the gospel should be provided for materially.

8. The examples in verse 7 stem from everyday life in the world, from what soldiers, vineyard owners and shepherds do. One could object that such secular and worldly examples are scarcely compelling, because Paul's reasoning relies on *human authority*. The argument presented here is no indication that Paul's apostleship was questioned. Instead, Paul uses arguments which were quite typical for one trained as a rabbi, amassing a whole group of them to support his case. Hence, Paul turns to the Law (*nomos*) to buttress his case. The *Law* in Paul often refers to proscriptions and commands from the Mosaic law, and that fits with what we find here since Deuteronomy 25:4 is cited. Indeed, in verse 9 it is specified that Paul draws from *the Law of Moses*. Paul's examples from the natural world, then, are supported by the law of Moses, by divine authority.

9–11. In his appeal to the law of Moses it is somewhat surprising that he cites Deuteronomy 25:4 (cf. also 1 Tim. 5:18). The command not to *muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain* seems at first glance to have nothing to do with financial support for those who preach the gospel. We might even ask why Paul appeals to the law at all, since he teaches that believers are no longer under the Mosaic law (Rom. 6:14–15; 7:4–6; 1 Cor. 9:20–21; Gal. 3:15–4:7). The Mosaic covenant belonged to a previous era, and now believers are under the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:20–21; Gal. 6:2). Commands such as those regarding circumcision (Rom. 2:25–29; 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:2–6; 6:12–13; Phil. 3:2–3), food laws (Rom. 14:14, 20; Col. 2:16–23; 1 Tim. 4:4) and the Sabbath (Rom. 14:5; Col. 2:16–17) are no longer required for believers. In Christ, Jews and Gentiles are one people, constituting a restored Israel (Eph. 2:11–3:13). Nevertheless, even though believers are not under the Mosaic covenant, the words in the Old Testament still constitute the word of God and they speak authoritatively to believers. How particular commands apply must be assessed in the light of the fulfilment which has come in Jesus Christ.

Paul seems to deny the obvious meaning of the verse, asking whether God is truly *concerned* with *oxen*. The scripture regarding oxen is *surely* (*pantos*) or 'really' (csb) or 'entirely' (nrsv) or 'certainly' (esv) 'for our sake' (csb). Is Paul's use of Scripture here allegorical, in the sense that it is completely sundered from its historical meaning? Some say that it is, and that Paul's appropriation of the text is quite defenceless. Others have argued that, when we read the context of Deuteronomy 24–25 closely, we find many instructions given for the welfare of human beings, and thus there is some indication that we should read the text about oxen similarly. This is a promising line of argument, but we still face the fact that the most natural way of reading the verse sees a literal reference to oxen. It seems unlikely that Paul would *deny* the literal sense. Paul would have known Proverbs 12:10: 'A righteous person cares for the life of his animal' (net). And the story of Balaam's donkey implies that humans do not have the right to beat animals (Num. 22:28). Paul resorts to a typical rabbinical argument from the lesser to the greater: if oxen should be fed when they are working and treading out grain, how much more is this true of those who proclaim the gospel?

Verbruggen is also probably right in suggesting that, in the original context in Deuteronomy, the admonition was given to those who rented an ox for threshing. They might be tempted to prevent the ox from eating the grain while threshing, but in doing so they would return the ox in a weakened state. Thus they would harm the economic position of the ox's owner, since the ox used for service would be weakened upon its return. Paul's point is that oxen should be fed while working, and thus Scripture teaches that work done in this world should be rewarded. If this is true in the natural sphere, it certainly follows in the spiritual sphere. Paul makes this very argument in verse 11 which follows, claiming that those who sow spiritual things should reap material rewards, and the reason why this is obvious is because the spiritual is more important than the material. Paul, then, does not deny the literal meaning of the saying about oxen, but applies it to spiritual realities, seeing a principle in the verse which relates to financial provision for those who proclaim the gospel.

Paul proceeds to say that *this was written for us*. Some understand what is *written* to refer to the saying that follows in verse 10; if this is the case, it is difficult to know the source of the writing, though Sirach 6:19 says something somewhat similar. But if the Greek word *hoti* is translated as *because* (as we find in the niv) instead of as 'that', then what is *written* refers back to Deuteronomy 25:4. Paul returns to his examples from everyday life, but now he has channelled them through the scriptural lens of Deuteronomy 25:4. Thus, both those who plough and those who thresh do so with the prospect of enjoying the fruits of their labour.

If those who do material work should be rewarded, the same principle applies spiritually: those who labour in the gospel should be rewarded materially. Romans 15:27 is quite similar: 'For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.' So also in 1 Corinthians 9:11 Paul draws a spiritual application. Those who proclaim the gospel have *sown*, so to speak, *spiritual seed*, and because they have done so, they should *reap a material harvest*—that is, they should be supported financially. Paul has succeeded in showing, then, that both ordinary life and the Scriptures point to the same conclusion: those who proclaim the gospel should be provided for materially.

12. The language of rights (*exousia*) appears twice in the verse; thus Paul continues to use himself as an example of one who does not use the rights he possesses. Others who proclaim the gospel receive support from the Corinthians, and, that being so, Paul certainly deserves support from them since he established and planted the Corinthian church (cf. 9:2). We should not interpret this comment as if the apostleship of Paul was being contested by the Corinthians. He is not lamenting their failure or lack of willingness to support him. Rather, he emphasizes his right to support for illustrative purposes. In fact, he interrupts his words about deserving support to convey the main purpose for the argument in chapter 9: Paul does not avail himself of the right to material support. On the contrary, he *puts up* (*stegomen*) with everything to avoid any hindrance to the advance of the gospel. Paul actually anticipates 13:7, where he declares that love 'bears all things' (csb; the niv 'protects' misses the connection). Love for others means that one desires to see the gospel of Christ maximized in their lives, and this explains Paul's refusal of material support. The issue arises again in 2 Corinthians, when Paul's apostleship was under attack; there he insists that he would not take financial support from the Corinthians, and he was thus able to distinguish himself from false apostles who were hucksters (2 Cor. 2:17; 11:7–15; 12:13).

Paul's integrity in financial matters was of paramount importance in his ministry (Acts 20:33–35; 2 Cor. 12:14–18; 1 Thess. 2:9). He was probably at a stage in his relationship with the Corinthians when he did not want them to understand the relationship in terms of patron–client. Patron–client relationships were ubiquitous in the Graeco-Roman world, and if the Corinthians thought that Paul was their client, expectations would be placed upon him that could limit his ministry. If the Corinthians were Paul's patrons, he would need to fulfil his role as their client.

13–14. The argument returns to a defence of financial support. Paul appeals to the Old Testament cult in verse 13 and the words of Jesus in verse 14. The principle once again is that those who work in holy things warrant financial support. Hence, those who *serve in the temple get their food from*

the temple. It is possible that Paul refers to the practice of pagan temples here, but, given his Jewish background, he almost certainly refers to the Old Testament. Indeed, he is providing another authoritative example from a scriptural source. Those serving *at the altar*, then, partake of some of the food that is *offered*. For instance, a portion of the offerings brought by Israel were to be eaten by Aaron and his sons (Num. 18:8, 18; cf. also Deut. 18:1–4).

The climactic argument for financial support comes from the words of Jesus himself, showing, incidentally, that the words of Jesus were authoritative for Paul (cf. also 7:10–11). The Lord himself instructed those who proclaimed the gospel to derive their living—their means of being provided for materially—from the gospel. In a discourse in which Jesus instructed his disciples to preach the kingdom, he says that 'the worker deserves his wages' (Luke 10:7). In 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul returns to the two texts mentioned here (Deut. 25:4; Luke 10:7) as he exhorts believers to support elders financially. It is possible, however, that the word from Jesus was not written at this point, and that Paul cites oral tradition. We find a similar injunction to support teachers in Galatians 6:6.

15. The argument turns a sharp corner—though it was anticipated in verse 12–as Paul declares decisively that he has not availed himself of the rights he possesses. And his point in writing is not to remedy the situation so that the Corinthians will respond by providing Paul with material support; quite the contrary. Indeed, Paul's passion on the matter is rather astonishing, for he says that he would prefer death to being deprived *of this boast*, the boast being the refusal to take support. The intensity in which he insists on not availing himself of support points forward to his words about not accepting support in 2 Corinthians 11:7–15, though in the latter instance Paul wants to separate himself from false teachers, whereas here Paul presents himself to the Corinthians for illustrative purposes. The reference to boasting seems odd since he often criticizes boasting (Rom. 3:27; 4:2; 1 Cor. 1:29, 31; 3:21; 4:7; 5:6; 13:4; Eph. 2:9). Boasting here, however, is not self-laudatory; Paul renounces pay for the sake of the gospel.

16. There is no room for Paul to boast in his preaching of the gospel, for he is *compelled* (*ananke*) to preach. The reference is to the Damascus road, where the risen Lord appeared to Paul and summoned him to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1–19; 22:1–21; 26:1–23; Gal. 1:11–17). When Paul refers to his compulsion and necessity to preach, he refers to his apostolic call. The language is hyperbolic; it is as if Paul had no choice about preaching since Jesus Christ confronted and saved him on the Damascus road. Hence Paul can declare a woe on himself if he does not *preach the gospel* (see Acts 9:15; 26:16). A divine necessity presses him to proclaim the word (cf. Rom. 1:14–15). Paul's experience reminds us of Jeremiah, when he decided not to speak any more in the Lord's name but was compelled to do so, since

his word is in my heart like a fire,
a fire shut up in my bones.
I am weary of holding it in;
indeed, I cannot.
(Jer. 20:9)

17–18. If Paul's ministry were voluntary, he would enjoy a *reward* (*misthon*), but we have seen that he was swept up into the ministry, so to speak, when he met Jesus Christ on the Damascus road. In a sense, then, Paul's ministry was 'not of my own will' (nrsv). He could not live without doing his apostolic ministry. Hence, as an apostle, he is 'entrusted with a commission' (csb), which means that he must be faithful to the *trust* (*oikonomian*) given to him (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1; Gal. 2:7). He was called, so to speak, against his will, but now that mercy has been shown to him, he must be faithful to the task assigned to him (cf. 1 Tim. 1:12–14).

When Paul asks what his *reward* (*misthos*) is, he dismisses the possibility that he will be rewarded for preaching the gospel. No reward is possible since he was constrained to proclaim the gospel; he felt an internal compulsion to preach that could not be resisted. On the other hand, whether he should accept payment for his ministry is another matter. On that point, Paul makes his own decision. In fact, in some contexts he accepts payment. Thus, in this situation his 'payment', his *reward*, is to offer the

gospel without charge. In doing so, Paul does not exercise his rights (*exousia*) as a preacher of the gospel. The exemplary character of the discussion surfaces again, for Paul wants the Corinthians to forego their rights as well. They should imitate Paul for the sake of others.[1]

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23

Gordon Fee, In the *NICNT*, explains Paul's thinking in regards to cultural adaptation:

19 With these words Paul now returns to the opening question, "Am I not free?" But he does so by way of the immediately preceding argument, where he had used the analogy of a household manager (often a trusted slave) as the reason he could not receive "pay" (vv. 17–18). With an explanatory (or inferential) "for,"347 he now argues that, since he is thus "free and belongs to no one," he has paradoxically used that freedom to become "a slave to everyone." Because he is Christ's slave, he must work without pay; but working without pay also makes him free from any merely human restraints on his ministry, so that he might freely become other people's slave as well. In saying that he is "free from all," therefore, Paul is not referring to inner freedom, nor to freedom from sin or the law. Rather, he primarily means "financially independent of all." In this context that especially means that he is also "free" of those, such as the Corinthians, who would use such material support as a means of manipulating him and his ministry. Because he is Christ's slave, he "belongs to no one," meaning he is "owned" by no others and is thus ultimately accountable only to his own Lord (= Master).

On the other hand, "freedom" is not his goal; the salvation of others is. Thus, since he is financially independent of all people, he is able freely to put himself at the disposal of all for the sake of the gospel. His language for this servanthood, "I made myself a slave to everyone," not only keeps the present metaphor intact but also is what he and his churches have learned to use about the ministry of Jesus, who became "slave" of all in order to save (cf. Phil. 2:5–8; Gal. 4:4–5). This is why Paul regularly uses the word "servant" (or "slave") to speak of his own ministry (cf. 2 Cor. 4:5), and also why this becomes the basic expression of believers' relationships to one another (e.g., Gal. 5:13): Jesus himself is the paradigm for such servanthood. Free, in order to become slave/servant to all—this is surely the ultimate expression of truly Christian, because it is truly Christlike, behavior.

In this context his becoming slave of all is to be understood in light of the examples that follow, thus referring to his willingness to accommodate himself to whatever social setting he found himself in, so as "to win353 as many as possible." Such language, as the later interchange with "save" (v. 22b) makes clear, can only refer to evangelizing. Thus Paul's first concern in such matters is not whether he offends or does not offend—although that too is a concern (10:32)—but whether the gospel itself will get its proper hearing (cf. 10:33).

20 Paul now proceeds to delineate what "making himself a slave to all in order to win as many as possible" means, by specifying some of the kinds of social settings in which he practiced evangelism. Although the package seems carefully constructed,357 its special features suggest that it is an ad hoc piece of rhetoric designed to defend his own past actions. Even though one cannot be certain about the specifics in some cases ("those under the law" and "the weak"), there can be little question that he is reflecting on his differing conduct in Jewish and Gentile settings, the central issue being questions of Jewish law. To put it in more contemporary terms, when he was among Jews he was kosher; when he was among Gentiles he was nonkosher—precisely because, as with circumcision, neither mattered to God (cf. 7:19; 8:8). But such conduct tends to matter a great deal to the religious—on either side!—so that inconsistency in such matters is viewed as especially perverse.

Paul's policy quite transcended petty consistency—and "religion" itself. His concern was "to win the Jews," as well as all others; thus "to the360 Jews I became like a Jew." This opening item serves as

[1] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 181–189.

the clue for understanding the others. How can a Jew determine to "become *like* a Jew"? The obvious answer is, In matters that have to do with Jewish religious peculiarities, which Paul as a disciple of the Risen One had long ago given up as having any bearing on one's relationship with God. These would include circumcision (7:19; Gal. 6:15), food laws (8:8; Gal. 2:10–13; Rom. 14:17; Col. 2:16), and special observances (Col. 2:16). On these questions not only was Paul himself free; he also took a thoroughly polemical stance toward any who would impose such requirements on Gentile converts. On the other hand, he had no problem with Jewish converts continuing such practices, as long as they were not considered to give people right standing, or special advantages, with God. Nor did he exhibit unwillingness to yield to Jewish customs for the sake of the Jews (cf. Acts 16:1–3; 21:23–26). Although one cannot be certain, from the general context as well as the clear parallels with what will come later (10:23–33) one may infer that food laws are the specific issue here, especially the prohibition against eating marketplace food because of its associations with idolatry. Paul himself felt free to eat such food, as his concluding word (10:23–30) makes certain. The present text suggests that he also willingly refrained when he was in more strictly Jewish settings. It is probably this conduct, more than any other, to which his Corinthian opponents took exception.

The second item ("to those under the law") is more puzzling. Ordinarily this would simply refer to Jews; but does it also do so when listed as a second item following "the Jews"? Most likely it does, and is so expressed because the specific issue was related not simply to matters of national origin but especially to matters of Jewish (religious) legal requirements.368 Particularly significant is the parenthetical addition, "though370 I myself am not under the law." By these words Paul intends to clarify his own conduct as a matter of freedom—he "freely" made himself a "slave" for the sake of others—not of obligation. The difference, therefore, between his own behavior and that of his social companions is not in the behavior itself, which will be identical to the observer, but in the reasons for it. The latter abstain because they are "under the law"; it is a matter of religious obligation. Paul abstains because he loves those under the law and wants to win them to Christ. Despite appearances, in reality the differences are as night and day.

21 The third item in the series, "those not having the law," corresponds to the second as its opposite. Paul is here referring to his conduct among Gentiles, including the majority of the Corinthian believers, and especially those who stand against him within the community. This item, plus the coming conclusion (v. 22b, "all things to all people"), seems to rule out the idea that Paul in this paragraph is offering himself as an example of *self-restraint*, since among these people he undoubtedly "ate whatever was put before him without raising any questions of conscience" (10:27). Their knowledge of his conduct in their presence, and of his abstinence when among "those under the law," offers the best solution to the historical occasion of this paragraph.

The qualification in this instance is full of interest. As in the previous clause, he begins, "I became as one without the law, though I myself am not without the law." But he can scarcely resist a play on words. Among Gentiles he behaves as one who is *anomos* (not under Jewish law), but he is not thereby to be considered *anomos* ("lawless" = "godless, wicked"; cf. 1 Tim. 1:9), which point is made by adding the qualifier "toward God." Indeed, he goes on, I am *ennomos* (lit. "in law" = subject to law) toward Christ. His point is plain: He wishes no misunderstanding of the word *anomos*, which would ordinarily mean to behave in a godless way. To be "as one without the law" does not mean to be "lawless." As earlier (7:19) this is a clear instance in which Paul can distinguish between keeping "the law" and obeying the ethical imperatives of the Christian faith. For Paul the language "being under (or 'keeping') the law" has to do with being Jewish in a national-cultural-religious sense; but as a new man in Christ he also expects the Spirit to empower him (as well as all of God's new people) to live out the ethics of the new age, which are the "commands of God" (7:19) now written on hearts of flesh (cf. Ezek. 36:26–27).

In this instance the Christian ethical imperative is characterized in a most unusual way of speaking (for Paul, at least), as being "under Christ's law." Paul uses the word "law," of course, because of the wordplay involving "law" compounds. This does not mean that in Christ a new set of laws has taken the place of the old, although in terms of specifics it would certainly refer to those kinds of ethical demands given, for example, in Rom. 12 and Gal. 5–6, so many of which do reflect the teaching

of Jesus. Given the frequency of "lawlessness" among the Corinthians who opposed him, it is not difficult to understand the reason for this significant qualification!375

22 Since the three preceding items have to do with Jewish or Gentile social settings, what then does Paul intend by this final item, "to the weak I became weak"? On the one hand, this is probably Paul's way of beginning to bring the argument back around to where he left it (at 8:13–9:1). This seems all the more likely, since it follows hard on the heels of the discussion of the previous group, who almost certainly represent those with whom Paul is in conflict in this church and with whom he has been arguing throughout the letter. At the same time, however, especially since he speaks also of "winning them," one must be careful of too specific an identification with the "weak" mentioned earlier (8:7–13). Perhaps the missing comparative ("like") is more significant than is often allowed.378 This may well reflect a moment of realism and thereby intentionally be a more generalizing category. For any number of reasons, partly related to his working with his own hands, Paul experienced considerable weakness in Corinth (see on 2:1–5; 4:9–13; cf. 2 Cor. 4:7–18; 11:16–12:10). As noted regarding an earlier passage (4:9–13), he considered this to be a paradigm of the Christian life; thus "to the weak," that is, the majority of the Corinthian believers (cf. 1:26–31), he "became weak, to win the weak." Thus this language probably represents a more purely sociological category than a socio-religious one. And the comparable contrast ("strong to the strong") not only would not fit the present argument, but would finally border on nonsense. At this point Paul is a conscious follower of the humble carpenter from Nazareth, who had "nowhere to lay his head."

However one is able to "fine tune" what has preceded, Paul's concluding sentence, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means381 I might save some," summarizes and thereby generalizes the argument. The apostle's actions, which appear to them to be inconsistent, have integrity at a much higher level. Whereas he is intransigent on matters that affect the gospel itself, whether theological or behavioral (e.g., 1:18–25; 5:1–5, etc.), that same concern for the saving power of the gospel is what causes him to become all things to all people in matters that don't count. The substitution of the verb "save" in this final clause makes it certain that the verb "win" in the five earlier clauses meant precisely that—eschatological salvation for the perishing through Christ's death and resurrection (cf. 1:18, 21). For Paul everything is subordinated to this central concern of his life, this "destiny" that God has laid upon him (v. 16).

23 The argument concludes with a final, clear affirmation of the singular passion of his life: "All things for the sake of the gospel" (cf. vv. 12b, 15–18). The preceding argument makes it clear that by "the gospel" Paul is not referring to its content as such, but to the proclaimed gospel as God's saving power at work in the world (cf. Rom. 1:16). Thus he means "for the sake of *the progress* of the gospel." But the final purpose clause, (lit.) "that I may be a fellow-participant in it," is less than certain. Is he referring to his participation in the *work* of the gospel, as in the preceding argument (esp. vv. 16–18), or to his sharing with them in its *benefits* ("blessings, promises"), in anticipation of the paragraph that follows? Although the former is an attractive option, Paul's usage elsewhere suggests that he means the latter. The problem, of course, is that this sounds self-serving and seems to undercut what has been said in the preceding verses. But not so. Paul is not so much suggesting that he does all things so that in the end he will receive the benefits of the gospel, as that he places himself alongside those to whom he has preached and to whom he now writes. Along with them, he hopes to share in the final blessings of the gospel.

But such is not guaranteed; he and they must persevere in the gospel to share in its promises. Despite his final confidence in the sovereign work of God's prior grace, he has genuine concern for the Corinthians, whose attendance at the cultic meals in the pagan temples is putting them in real jeopardy. And no false security in the sacraments (10:1–4) will help. Hence this concluding note on his own desire to share in the final blessings of the gospel leads him directly to an exhortation that they, too, as he, "run in such a way as to get the prize" (v. 24b), so that they will not be "disqualified" (v. 27).

COMMENTARY NOTES

This passage has often been looked to for the idea of "accommodation" in evangelism, that is, of adapting the *message* to the language and perspective of the recipients. Unfortunately, despite the need for that discussion to be carried on, this passage does not speak directly to it. This has to do with how one lives or behaves among those whom one wishes to evangelize (not, it needs to be added in passing, with social taboos among Christians). What needs to be emphasized is the point expressed clearly by Bornkamm: "Paul could not modify the gospel itself according to the particular characteristics of his hearers. The whole of his concern is to make clear that the changeless gospel, … empowers him to be free to change his stance." This especially needs to be heard among those who would equate certain nonethical behavioral items with the gospel itself.

The greater difficulty for all who would so preach Christ is our inherent resistance, due to the fall, to the imitation of Christ expressed at the beginning (v. 19), that freedom leads to making oneself the servant of all in order to win them. Unfortunately, freedom too often is abused in the direction of self-interest rather than expressed in terms of concern for others and for the progress of the gospel.[2]

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

In the *Pillar Bible Commentary*, Roy Ciampa looks at Paul's metaphor of an athlete laboring for a prize:

9:24 Once again Paul introduces ideas that should be familiar to the Corinthians with *Do you not know?* They certainly would have known about games and stadiums based on the proximity of Corinth to the Isthmian games, which were held under the patronage of the city of Corinth and which attracted thousands of visitors to the city every other year (including a.d. 49 and 51). The Isthmian games were one of the four major Greek athletics competitions, the others being the Olympic, Pythian, and Nemean games.10 Paul may or may not have attended the games. While all but the most Hellenized Palestinian Jews considered them out-of-bounds, Murphy-O'Connor suggests that the same attitude may not have prevailed elsewhere, pointing out that "many Hellenized Jews had no compunction about attending the games" and that "Jews had specially reserved seats in the theatre at Miletus in western Asia Minor."12

Perhaps this was one of the areas in which Paul (like Hellenized Jews) became as one not under the law when among Gentiles. Ethical objection to the games themselves could stimulate as easily as squelch a fascination with what went on there and certainly would not require a rejection of the positive ideals that may have been associated with the discipline of those who competed. In fact, much philosophical usage of athletic motifs emphasized the idea that there were much more important goals (honors, prizes, rewards) toward which one should strive than those for which the athletes aimed. Pfitzner speaks of the "favourite antithesis between the 'holy' and 'profane' contests" in literature influenced by Greek philosophy. Certainly anyone who lived in Corinth would have known all about the games. Paul almost certainly would have done business with those visiting the games, and probably with those competing in them as well. He may have made some of the tents in which many of the visitors stayed.14

Paul employs a series of athletic metaphors in vv. 24–27, referring specifically to two of the events that made up the games, namely, running (racing; vv. 24, 26a) and boxing (vv. 26b–27). He also makes reference to competitors in general (v. 25). As noted above, illustrations drawn from the world of the famous athletic games were, in fact, quite popular in pagan moral philosophy. The paragraph begins in v. 24 with a focus on the Corinthians marked by forms in the second-person plural (you know, you run), then moves to a contrast between them and us in v. 25, and concludes by personalizing the material in vv. 26–27 (which is marked by forms in the first-person singular).

[2] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 469–477.

COMMENTARY NOTES

The Corinthians obviously know *that all the runners in the stadium run the race but only one gets the prize*. They should learn from the analogy and themselves *run in such a way as to get the prize*. It would be dangerous, of course, to overinterpret the athletic metaphor, as though every facet of the athlete's situation (or even most or many of them) found an exact parallel in the life of the Christian. (See the discussion of the interpretation of metaphorical language in our comments introducing 3:5–9.) The sentence here stresses the contrast between *all* and *one* with slightly more stress placed on the *one*. Pfitzner suggests that "Paul, by pointing directly to the example of the runners in the arena who exert all their strength and energy to become the 'one', sets the stage for the theme of [self-control] which follows. All the endeavours of the athlete are in vain if he has not trained his body and abstained from all that may in any way harm his physical condition."20 In his view the key point of comparison in vv. 24–27 lies solely in v. 25 with the central theme of self-control:

It is only by isolating the two verses that commentators have concluded that the major stress lies on the necessity of the Christian's total strength, of maximum endeavor in the struggle to attain to the heavenly prize. This conclusion is only possible by falsely subordinating the central theme of [self-control], and by raising the preparatory picture of the striving runner and the complementary image of the victor's crown to a position of independent importance. Not the thought of maximum exertion but rather the theme of self-restriction (as developed in vv. 19–23) dominates in Paul's mind.

Pfitzner is correct to question an emphasis on striving or struggle per se, and a tendency to focus solely on the issue of eternal reward rather than self-restraint. However, he may be guilty of underinterpreting the passage. Both are present in the passage. Fee properly recognizes that "the primary point of the metaphors is the imperative of v. 24b, which controls the entire paragraph. Paul is urging the Corinthians to "run" the Christian life in such a way, in this case *by exercising proper self-control* (the emphasis in vv. 25–27), as to obtain the eschatological reward." Paul does not elaborate on the prize he has in mind for the Christian. Fee suggests that Paul has in mind "the eschatological victory itself." Here again our proper understanding of where we are in God's eschatological program provides the most basic orientation for our lives; we live as those existing during the inbetween time of the "already" and the "not-yet"; inhabiting the world over which Christ already reigns as people who will be rewarded by the king at the consummation of the age. The figure of the eternal reward "is intended to impress upon them that the goal, being eternal in nature, is of such value that it should affect the way they live in the present."

The point, of course, is not to suggest that Christians are to think of each other as competitors, seeking to win a prize that might otherwise go to a brother or sister in Christ! Although team sports did not exist as we know them, Paul obviously expects many Christians to run in such a way as to receive a heavenly reward. Christians must do whatever it takes to finish well since "the laurels go only to the victor, in this case, a multitude of victors." The Corinthians are not to seek to be like all the runners, but like the one who receives the prize. As Pfitzner emphasizes, the following verses will clarify that the way to run in order to win is through the discipline of self-control.25 As Garland puts it, the Corinthians "are to run as if their life depended on it. It does."

9:25 What makes for a winning athlete? Uncontroversially, Paul reckoned that it was self-control or self-restraint: *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training*. The Greek word translated by TNIV as "strict training" is helpfully defined by BDAG as "to keep one's emotions, impulses, or desires under control, *control oneself*, *abstain*." The TNIV here fails to catch the precise emphasis on self-control suggested by Paul's more literal statement, "Everyone who contends for a prize exercises self-control in all respects." Athletes were held to be excellent models of self-control. While their self-discipline, as Paul suggests, needed to apply to all areas, Mitchell points out that the example of the athlete's bodily discipline is "particularly apt" since "the athlete's self-renunciation is precisely in those areas of Corinthian dispute: sexual behavior and diet. The same need for self-control is no less relevant in the modern world where immediate hedonistic gratification is a given and fulfilling one's desires is taken to be a healthy response irrespective of the context or social implications. The athlete forgoes present pleasures for the sake of a later ultimate good, which is the advice which Paul urges on the Corinthians." She points out that in his comments on this verse

COMMENTARY NOTES

Chrysostom refers to the athlete's need to exercise self-control by refraining, in particular, from getting drunk with wine and from sexual immorality.31 It is particularly important when reading figurative language in an ancient text, as with Paul's metaphor in these verses, to locate accurately the nature of the imagery, and not to read into the text modern associations. An athlete's self-restraint is exalted as an example to be passed on in Plato's *Laws* 8.839e–840c.

Paul uses the athletic metaphor to provide an inspirational image of a person who is looked up to for their remarkable self-discipline in the pursuit of excellence and glory. Today great athletes are still looked up to as people who have mastered their skills by mastering their bodies. People usually want to emulate such heroes, and Paul hopes that the Corinthians will be inspired by the metaphor to emulate their famed self-control.

Athletes exercise such self-control in order *to get a crown that will not last* (literally, "a perishable crown"); *but we do it get a crown that will last forever* (literally, "an imperishable one"). This reflects the standard philosophical use of the athletic motif, whereby the award sought by those pursuing athletic victory is contrasted with the greater one pursued by the one dedicating their life to virtue and philosophy.35 Seneca provides a good example of the motif: "What blows do athletes receive on their faces and all over their bodies! Nevertheless, through their desire for fame they endure every torture, and they undergo these things not only because they are fighting but in order to be able to fight. Their very training means torture. So let us also win the way to victory in all our struggles,—for the reward is not a garland or a palm or a trumpeter who calls for silence at the proclamation of our names, but rather virtue, steadfastness of soul, and a peace that is won for all time."

In the local Isthmian games, the victor's crown was woven out of withered celery, while Christians anticipate an eternal reward from the God who called them. Hays paraphrases Paul's thought this way: "If these athletes push themselves to the limit in training to win that pathetic crown of withered vegetables, how much more should we maintain self-discipline for the sake of an imperishable crown?"38

Hays rightly reminds us that Paul's argument does not suggest that the body is the enemy of the spiritual life; "rather it is the instrument of that life" and "the 'punishment' of the body refers to grueling training for the contest, seeking to bring the body to peak efficiency. To 'enslave' the body means, in this context, to devote it unreservedly to God's service through service to others (cf. 9:19), not to practice self-denial for its own sake." These verses bring to mind Paul's imperative to "honor God with your bodies" in 6:20 and the central role it plays in chapters 5–7. Paul's high view of the body, in the light of the resurrection of Christ, is a pervasive theme in the letter.

9:26 Paul personalizes the argument by moving to the first-person singular in describing his approach in terms of two metaphors from the context of the athletic games. The first continues the metaphor of running which began in v. 24, while the second is grammatically and rhetorically parallel but introduces the metaphor of boxing. In stating that he does *not run like someone running aimlessly* (literally, "uncertainly"), Paul evidently means "not as one who has no fixed goal" (BDAG). He is very deliberate in how he lives his life and carries out his ministry. Obviously he does not feel that the Corinthians are being very intentional or disciplined in their approach. Paul is not like an occasional jogger who appreciates the value of a run now and then. His approach is more like the dedicated athlete who is strictly disciplined, knowing that his success depends on it.

Paul's reference to *a boxer beating the air* could refer to one who is shadowboxing (not engaged in a real contest) or to "unskillful boxers, who miss their mark" (BDAG). As Schmidt points out, the parallel language in the two parts of the verse, "*I do not run/fight like …*" suggests that they should be understood together and probably make the same point, such that not beating the air is similar to not running aimlessly. "I run as one who is not without a sure goal (i.e., who has a precise goal), I fight as one who does not swing aimlessly in the air (but I train systematically)." Johannes Weiss argues similarly that a boxer who fails to hit his opponent and only manages to flay the air "is unskillful, careless, undisciplined." Robertson and Plummer compare the body to "the horses in a chariot race,

which must be kept well in hand by whip and rein if the prize is to be secured."44 What Paul has in mind with the image of a boxer who does not beat the air is clarified not only by its relationship with the previous clause, but also by the contrast in the following verse.

9:27 While a boxer is trained to beat his opponent, Paul's metaphor surprises us with its suggestion that his opponent is his own body! *I strike a blow to my body*, he says, *and make it my slave*. It is his body that must be dominated and mastered. He must "make it strictly serve my purposes, bring it under strict control." That, he says, is *so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize*. Whether or not Paul continues the athletic metaphor here is a contested issue. Some hold that the "preaching to others" refers to the role of "the herald who has called the athletes to the line (although in his illustration he remains an athlete himself)." But the word is used frequently enough by Paul to refer to Christian preaching (Rom. 10:8, 14–15; 1 Cor. 1:23; 15:11–12; 2 Cor. 1:19; 4:5; 11:4; Gal. 2:2; 5:11; Phil. 1:15; Col. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:9; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 4:2) that it is unlikely that readers would not have understood it in that sense here, especially since any metaphorical interpretation would have required a significant role change for Paul in any case (from athlete to herald). It is also unlikely that the herald's role in the games would have been simply referred to as "preaching to others."

There is a greater likelihood that the last part of the verse might reflect a return to the athletic metaphor. Sampley argues that the word *disqualified* is "a technical term of athletics in which a competitor fails the test or is thrown out of the competition."49 Such a technical usage, however, is not attested in any of the lexicons or dictionaries. Whether understood within the context of the previous athletic metaphor or not, the word clearly refers to God's potential eschatological judgment on Paul (and also on the Corinthians). It suggests being rejected as unworthy by the ultimate judge. Philo describes the history of Israel after receiving the law with its "gentle instructions and exhortations" as well as "threats and warnings" through the use of the image of the athletic contests, and allegorically describes the defeated as "whole lives that fall, which once overthrown can hardly be raised up again." The image of "falling" (as in the previous sentence) is used both in Philo and Paul to refer to ultimate divine rejection. This is an important part of the rhetorical motivation (or parenesis/moral exhortation) essential to keeping the Corinthians from underestimating the dangerous position in which their attitudes and practices have placed them. As Garland puts it, "Paul is engaged in moral exhortation and not discoursing on the security of the believer." He wants the Corinthians to ask, as does Chrysostom, "Now if Paul feared this, who had taught so many, and feared it after his preaching …; what can we say?"54 One of the ways in which God secures the perseverance of believers is by such stern warnings.

The athletic metaphors may ironically relate to the Corinthians' issues with "weaker brothers and sisters" in their midst, suggesting that they need to pay more attention to their own potential "weaknesses" to make sure they do not keep them from falling short of the finish line.

It would be a grave error to think that Paul is somehow relating salvation to the adoption of an ascetic lifestyle, as though harsh treatment of the body were the key to salvation. Rather, Paul's language about self-restraint rather than self-indulgence probably has more to do with the motifs of fleeing sexual immorality and idolatry, in this case, idolatry associated with food. As noted above, athletes were famous for their discipline especially in the areas of sex and food, the areas that most preoccupy Paul's arguments in this letter. In the context of Paul's references to the discipline of his body, we should recall that the body is sometimes especially associated with its appetites for food or sex (Rom. 1:24; 6:12; 1 Cor. 6:13, 18).

In the following passage (10:1–13) Paul will remind the Corinthians of the dismal failure of the Israelites who gave in to their "evil cravings" and were destroyed due to their apostasy, which manifested itself principally through idolatry, sexual immorality, and greed. When we recall the prominence of these vices in the lists of 5:11 and 6:9–10 (which points out that those who practice such vices will not inherit the kingdom of God), we can see a pattern in Paul's thought. The Corinthians do not need to adopt every aspect of Paul's lifestyle, but they do need to take much more seriously the potential

COMMENTARY NOTES

for apostasy by following uncritically their appetites for food (including idol food) and sex (including illegitimate sex). They are to show the kind of discipline modeled by Joseph while in Potiphar's house (see on 6:18) or perhaps Daniel with regard to the table of Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Dan. 1:8). Whether they eat or drink, or in whatever they do (perhaps especially in their diet and sexual relations), they are to glorify God and flee from sexual immorality and idolatry. To do otherwise is to run headlong into apostasy.[3]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mark A. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary
Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT)
Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)
Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary
Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary
David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today
William Baker, *1 Corinthians*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary
Paul Ellingwroth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on 1 Corinthians*, UBSH

[3] Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 435–443.