



God's Church (Week 8/18: Foregoing personal preferences)

Small Group Discussion Questions

Warm-Up

1. Do you recall a time when you have foregone your rights for the sake of someone else or others?
2. Why do YOU consider our churches (generally) are missing whole generations of people?

The examples – 1 Corinthians 8 and 9:1-18

3. Why for Paul, was it no big deal as to whether or not meat was sacrificed to idols?
4. What does Paul say about the difference between idols and God who we worship?
5. Why might meat sacrificed to idols have been a problem to someone?
6. Even though Paul sees meat sacrificed to idols as nothing to be concerned about, why did he come to the conclusion that we would give up meat all together?
7. Though Paul had a right to be supported by those to whom he ministered, why did he decide not to accept such support?
8. What do we learn from these examples?

The principle – 1 Corinthians 9: 19-23

7. Why was it so important for Paul to win as many people as possible into relationship with Jesus?
8. What did Paul hope to gain by becoming like 'those under the law' in some cases and those 'not under the law' in others? Might he be accused of being disingenuous? What was his aim?
9. What might this principle mean for us in our context? (Do we share Paul's burning passion to see people saved 'by all possible means'?)
10. Is it possible we just don't care enough about young families and young people to make the changes which may be needed to reach them with the good news of Jesus?
11. What might we be prepared to forego if it meant providing a context in our church where families and young people feel more welcome and included?

The discipline – 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

12. Why will it take discipline to put this principle into action?

Apply *What are you prepared to forego to see the lost, saved?*

Pray *Heavenly Father, thank you for the freedom we have in Christ. Give us your compassion for those who don't know you so that are prepared to anything it takes to see people won into relationship with him. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*



God's Church (Week 8/18: Building Up) Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Front Line this Week

Are there any other Christians on your frontline that you could encourage, as you serve Jesus together?

For Families

Download some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- TALK: “We have a ministry” by John Stott: https://www.allsouls.org/Media/Player.aspx?show_popout=true&show_media=220949&show_file=234358
- TALK: “Don’t cause others to stumble”: <https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/52341/>
- TALK: “Why not to prize freedom too highly” by Hugh Palmer: https://www.allsouls.org/Media/Player.aspx?show_popout=true&show_media=51049&show_file=53234
- ARTICLE: “Christian: Will you negative split your life?” by Steve McAlpine: <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/christian-will-negative-split-life/>

Series Resources:

Some helpful resources for this series:

- Website: “First Corinthians” by the Bible Project: <https://bibleproject.com/learn/1-corinthians/>
- Course: “1 Corinthians” as part of the Ridley Certificate (6-week online course): stbarts.com.au/ridley
- For Families: Bookmark Reading Plan for Families (Weeks 1-9): <https://bit.ly/3uoz4gs>
- Access relevant books in the St Bart’s Library: www.librarycat.org/lib/stbart/search/tag/1+Corinthians

Date: 27 June 2021
Services: Across the diocese
Series: **God's church** - 1 Corinthians
Title: **Forgoing preferences to save some**
Passage: 1 Corinthians 8-9
Outline:
1. The examples
2. The principle
3. The discipline

Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 8 and then 9: 9-23

The discussion at the clergy and lay ministers' retreat last week became quite lively.

We were discussing why in most of our churches there are whole generations – not just one – but many generations of people missing...

Generations the age of your **children** and **grandchildren** – **maybe grandchildren**.

Perhaps we are missing **YOUR** children and grandchildren!

Why is that?

One person among us dared to suggest that over the years we just haven't **cared** enough about families and young people to make the **changes** to the way we **do** things that are **needed** if these people are going to **connect** to **church**.

Well that really set us talking...

...and well I've really jumped right in there haven't I in raising a hot topic!?

Have we been just too preoccupied with doing church the way **we want to do church** – and in so doing - failed to love and serve the needs of those coming behind us?

This is right on topic for 1 Corinthians 8-9 today.

This issue for Paul which we'll come to in a moment... is – seeing people saved...

He says he's going to do all he can – **anything** he can – to ensure that by **all possible means** – he might save **some**...

He will forgo **personal preferences and let go of his rights**, if it means that some people are **rescued** from **sin and death** and are **forgiven** and have **eternal life**.

Here is what he does in these two chapters....

He gives some **examples** of what he is talking about

He then espouses the **principle** driving all this

And then he tells us that it will take some **discipline** to achieve it.

First then: the **examples**.

1. THE EXAMPLES

There are a number of examples where Paul says he does not insist on his **rights** – in fact he forgoes his rights – for the sake of something way more important...

Here are the examples

1. Food sacrificed to idols
2. Food and drink in general
3. Marriage
4. And being financially supported by those to whom he is ministering

Let me deal with these quite quickly

The issue with food sacrificed to idols was quite simple.

You remember Corinth was quite a cosmopolitan city... there were many temples – many gods – many idols – many practices associated with the temple worship which would make your hair stand on end.

But the point here is that some of the meat sold in the markets, had been sacrificed to **idols** – ie – non-existent gods – and then sold in the market place.

Now for the apostle Paul – this was not an issue. He would quite happily pick up a side of lamb and go home and put it on the BBQ without his conscience being pricked...

Because - an idol is nothing!

It doesn't exist! So therefore, meat sacrificed to idols – makes no difference to the meat whatsoever.

Ch 8 v4 – *'an idol is nothing at all in the world' for 'there is no God but one'.*

v5 – for even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth... yet for us there is but one God, the Father from whom all things came and for whom we live, and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live

Idols are nothing and therefore... food sacrificed to idols – is nothing.

Makes no difference to the actual food...

IN any case he says in v8 – food does not bring us near to God.

However – however! – what if someone we know, doesn't **know** there is only one true God – and **you** eating food sacrificed to an **idol** is an **offence** to them...

Because they are so accustomed to idols... they think of the meat in their head as being sacrificed to a **god**... and therefore for **them** it is **defiled**.

In that case, Paul says - *be careful that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.*

He has the right to eat meat – of **course** he **does**.

But if that is **stumbling block** to someone **sensitive** about the issue – than he says – **he won't do it**.

Foregoing **personal preferences** – forgoing **rights** – for the sake of **others**.

So strongly does he feel about this that he says in v13 *Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall!*

Wow! Love a good BBQ – but if it is going to cause harm or upset to my brother and sister – I'm not going to do it!

Now – meat sacrificed to idols – that's not an issue for us.

There is application for us though from this principle though – and I'll come to that... but first let's look at Paul's other examples.

Three other examples... which he groups together and deals with much more briefly...

As an apostle, he argues, he has certain other rights...

He has the right to food and drink... he has the right to take a believing wife along with him on his missionary journeys... and he has a right to NOT **work** for a living but to be supported financially by those to whom he ministers... and he spends some time in ch 9 vv12-18 on that last issue... explaining in v14 that *the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel....* Which is why we support our ministers with a stipend..

BUT – BUT – he doesn't insist on *any* of these... /// why?

Because in the Corinthian context – it was **hindering** the gospel of Christ – v12b – because some of the Corinthians didn't think he was a **real** apostle like others who came with clever rhetoric who they put up on **pedestals**.

They didn't want to support **Paul** who they saw as quite **pedestrian**. So if he insisted on being financially supported when they didn't really support him, that was going to be a stumbling block to the ministry.

However, just because he's not supported financially – doesn't mean he's not going to **preach**... **Nothing** is going to stop him... it's something that's burning **inside** of him – so much so he says 'woe to me if I **don't** preach the gospel!

His reward he says, is the fact that he offers it free of charge and with the knowledge that he not standing on his rights!

So – **meat sacrificed to idols?**

He can **eat** that if he wants... but he **won't** if it causes **offense**

Food and drink? He has a right to those **from** those he serves – but he won't **insist** on that right if it causes **offense**

Paul wasn't married but he has the right to take a believing wife along with him on his journeys... but his colleagues **won't** if it causes **offense!**

He has the **right** to be supported by those to whom he ministers – but he **won't insist on it** if it is a **stumbling block**...

Because here is:

2. THE PRINCIPLE

The underlying principle in all this – is to **win** people into relationship with Jesus

Seeing people won – saved is way more important to him than *any* of those other things!

v19 *Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible*

that is his absolute **driving passion**... to see people **saved**... **won** into relationships with **Christ**.

So – he won't eat meat sacrificed to **idols** if it might prevent someone coming into relationship with Jesus

He won't insist on his rights to a **stipend** for ministry – if it is going to prevent someone coming into relationship with Jesus

And he says 9:20ff – *to the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law to as to win those under the law. To those NOT under the law (that is – Gentiles) I became like one not*

having the law so as to win those not having the law... To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings!

Forgoing **personal preferences** – or even **rights** – for the **sake** of the **gospel**.

Winning people to Christ was **everything** for Paul... so he will do anything to that end... even when it's costly.

Why was that **everything**?

Because he knew that if people are not **WON** into relationship with Jesus – or '**saved**' – by which he means saved from **sin and death** – then they are going to an eternity **WITHOUT** Jesus...! AND they are missing out here and now on the abundant life Jesus makes possible!

The question is – do we **care** enough that people are won into relationship with Jesus... do we care enough about that to give up our **rights** – to forego our **preferences**... so that that might **happen**.

Friends – these verses have shaped my ministry in the last 12 years.

I've wanted to get alongside people where they are at... so as to win people for Jesus.

Personally – I'm not a fan of the purple shirt – or this collar – or even the bishop's **robes**... perhaps that shocks you...

But I will **wear** them when **appropriate** – to get alongside for those for whom they are **important** – so that if any don't know **Jesus** – I might **win them** for **Jesus**...

And you'll have seen in my videos last year – to the **traditional** Anglican – I become **traditional Anglican** – and for the **contemporary Anglican** – I'll become contemporary Anglican.....

...so as to be **all** things to **all** people so that by **all possible means** I might save **some!** /

Does that make **sense**? //

The question will be – do **YOU** have burning passion to win people into relationship with Jesus – to see people **saved**?

You might have a personal preference for a full on sung Eucharist every Sunday... but that service is not attractive to the younger generations – in fact – it is actually quite alien to them!

Even though that is your **preference** – are you so keen to see us win **back** the **missing generations**, that you're prepared to say – '**anything it takes!**!??'

On retreat this past week, our retreat leader Kevin Simington shared a story from his ministry years ago – from a youth service in his church

The church was **packed** with young people.

There was a lovely **older** lady there who Kevin asked about the service... 'how did you like the music?' - well it's not my cup of tea... but she was beaming from ear to ear as she told Kevin how she felt... 'how did you feel about the relaxed nature of the service?' – Oh I hated it she said – again – huge smile...

...because she went on to say – "but isn't it just wonderful to see all these young people here!!"

When I was first at St Thomas' North Sydney back in the early 90s, as a young assistant minister... the rector was starting to make some small changes in his first year – and some people were grumbling...

I remember him visiting a lovely old lady who really loved the Lord Jesus – Nita Palmer... 93 and he was telling her about some of the complaints...

Her answer? She waved her walking stick at him and said - I don't care if you swing from the rafters as long as you help people know about Jesus! Beautiful!

Do you remember the comment made on retreat with which I started about why we are missing generations of people in our churches?

...the suggestion was made – we just didn't **care enough** about young people and children and families to do all we can that we might win some...

We insisted on communion every **week**...

We insisted our clergy wear **robes**

We insisted – only **hymns** – no modern **music**

We insisted – services be **formal** and **quiet**...

In other words... we insisted on our **rights**...!

Our motto was not – to become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some – but – we want everything to stay the same because that is what we are comfortable with...!

Whether people are won to relationship with Jesus – **saved** – well – that wasn't on our **agenda**

Perhaps because we just don't get that those who are not in relationship with Jesus are in eternal danger – or perhaps because we just didn't get it or just didn't care...!

Am I being **harsh**?

Maybe!

But how I'd love to hear reports from the clergy saying – Mark – Mark – my congregation is now saying to me – please – we must do **all** that we can so that by all possible means we might save some...

...people are dying out there without Jesus – they are in mortal danger – we must do something... we must become all things to all people...

Paul says in v23 – I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings...

That is... despite the personal **cost** and giving up certain **rights** – he'll do whatever it takes... (a) because he wants to see people **saved** but (b) he wants to share in the **blessings** of the **gospel** – that is - the **joy** of seeing people **saved**!

Remember Jesus' saying – there is great joy in heaven when one sinner repents??

That's the joy he anticipates having – and that **joy** friends is wonderful – and the joy of seeing people saved and forgiven as they come into relationship with Jesus – that is worth **anything** you might give up along the way to that great end!! //

But finally – and way too briefly - Paul points out – that this will take **discipline**

3. THE DISCIPLINE

Right now we are seeing reports of our Olympians training hard to ensure they are at their best come the games which begin very shortly...

Paul says – they do under go all that hard work – and all that strict training – to get what – a crown that will not last!! That's the reality.

But we must train and discipline ourselves – to let go of our rights – to forego our preferences – to get a crown that will last **forever!!** That is the joy of seeing people saved for all **eternity!** / To see something that you and I will rejoice in for all eternity.

Therefore he says – he trains and fights and makes his body a **slave** to the great task of preaching the gospel to others... even when it means foregoing his rights.

Everything to that great end...

Expending all his energy to see people saved... no matter what...

That's quite a picture! Nothing more **precious** – nothing more important – than seeing people come into relationship with **Jesus...** !! He'll **train himself** – **discipline** himself – forego all **sorts** of things – to that **great end!** //

So let me recap:

Does seeing people saved mean that much to us...?

To **YOU??** //

is it **important?** Does it **matter?** **Really** matter?

Matter so much that we will say – '**anything** to see that happen...!'

I'll give up my **rights...**

I'll put no **stumbling block** in any one's way

I'll forego my **preferences...**

I'll expend all my **energy** to that great **end...**

Is that **you?**

GIVE ME 15 MINUTES TO...

July 3/4 ... to explain who Jesus is

July 10/11 ... to tell you why I'm
not religious

July 17/18 ... to explore why sad
things happen to good people

July 24/25 ... to explain that
you are more loved than you dare
to hope



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