

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS - PART TEN

Having dealt in the last four chapters with issues of personal morality which caused damage first to the families involved and then to the church as a whole, Paul turned now to a series of problems in the way the church managed its affairs. These too, very readily, become a cause of deep division if not dealt with wisely. It is again a marvellous opportunity to draw upon the grace of God which even as struggling Christians we have in abundance.(1:1-9)

The first thorny problem Paul dealt with was that of the working conditions of those who minister. Should they be paid or not? He was clearly being criticised for his position - but not necessarily for the reason we might expect.(9:3) Before addressing his own situation he looked at the rights of other ministers. First, however, he established his credentials as an apostle, a special messenger of God. He was one of the privileged few who saw Jesus after His resurrection, and God had used him to bring many to Christ, including the Corinthians.(9:1-2) He often emphasised in his letters that he was appointed an apostle by God, not by man.(1:1; Gal.1:1) This confirms that Peter's haste to appoint a twelfth apostle in Acts 1 was premature because God would choose one more when He was ready. There could only be 12 apostles.(Rev.21:14)

Paul listed next the rights of a minister of the gospel, food and drink, a wife to accompany him, and the means for their support. He made it quite clear that the other apostles and Jesus' brothers all had wives working alongside them. There is obviously much God given wisdom in working as a married couple, even for those in itinerant ministry. A man working alone is exposed to much temptation but more than that there is the strength of a married partnership.(9:3-6) Paul went on to illustrate his point about support by speaking first of the soldier, the crop farmer and the shepherd being rewarded for what they did. He then took an even more humble example from the Old Testament of the ox pulling the plough who according to the Law,(Deut.25:4) was to be allowed to feed on what remained in the field.(9:7-10)

So there is no question that God intends that we should support those whom He uses to bless us through ministry. And those who minister faithfully have every right to expect that by whatever means they will be supported in their work.(9:11) Then Paul took his readers completely by surprise by declining to exercise his rights. His reason was that he did not want money to get in the way of people hearing his message clearly.(9:12) He used another illustration from the temple sacrifices to make it clear that workers could expect to be provided for. The priests ate a part of the sacrifice they offered.(Lev.2-5) Christian workers could surely expect the same benefit.(9:13,14) Paul gave explanation for his refusal to look to those he ministered to for their financial support. He wanted them to have no confusion about the gospel. It was the message of God's free grace. So easily, particularly in a city like Corinth where everything was bought and sold, people could get the idea that by putting into the offering they were paying for their salvation. For Paul the only reason he preached the gospel was an inner compulsion to do so, not his pay at the end of the week!(9:15-18)

Paul developed a wider principle underlying all effective Christian ministry, that we should be 'all things to all men'. He explained what he meant with examples from being a Jew, being a Gentile, and being weak as, for example, a slave. It is a matter of identifying with them in such a way that we do not get in the way of the gospel being clearly understood. We do not have to do what they

do, dress or talk like they do. It is simply a matter of letting God give us insight into their view of the world and particularly what might be a hindrance to their reception of the gospel.(9:19-23)

Paul's final illustration of this principle was that of an athlete running a race. A successful athlete will train and race, not with his eye on the other runners but on the finishing line and the trophy, in this case, Jesus. The race he described is not a 100 metre sprint but a lifelong marathon. In the course of our lives there will be many distractions and temptations, any one of which could spoil our successful completion of the course. Money could definitely be one of them.(9:24-27) The whole message of this chapter is again illustrating the teaching of chapter 8, that love for others in their need is far more important than our liberty or our rights. The misuse of money is sadly such a common cause of the downfall of Christian leaders. Sexual immorality, the topic of several previous chapters, is the other major cause.

In chapter 10 Paul took this principle further.

10:1-4 Q.1 What features of the Exodus journey did Paul compare to our Christian lives? How does each idea relate to our experience in becoming Christians and living the Christian life?

10:5-10 Q.2 What did the Israelites do with which God was displeased? Look up each story and draw out its warning as far as we are concerned. How do we make the same mistakes today?

10:11-13 Q.3 What according to this section is the value for us of studying the Old Testament? Was the failure of the Israelites inevitable? What warning on the one hand and encouragement on the other does Paul give us here?

10:14-22 Q.4 What topic from chapter 8 did Paul next return to? Having told them of their liberty as Christians what idea did he strongly urge them to consider? How would you put Paul's warning into one simple sentence?

10:23-33 Q.5 How does this section develop further our understanding of the idea that love is more important than liberty? What practical illustrations are used? What would be modern equivalents of the same situation? How again do they explain the principle of being 'all things to all men'?