Growing in Grace, Growing in Community: Life Lessons on Maturity with the Corinthians

***The Christian and Self: Rights vs. Responsibilities --*** 1 Corinthians 9:1-27

Growth Principle #10 came from chapter eight: “The spiritually mature Christian lives for others, even in the practical affairs of life.” In this chapter, Paul uses himself as a means of illustrating that principle. He tells the freedom-loving Corinthians that even though he was an apostle, which meant that he had certain rights, he did not exercise all those rights. Why? Because not doing so resulted in more opportunity for the gospel, and so for others to be saved. Paul is not boasting here, but really defending his apostleship, since some in Corinth cast suspicions on his ministry. They reasoned that someone as “important” as an apostle should be living better that Paul did. Ironically, it was this humility that validated his apostleship, and which now he could point to as an example of loving others. Here’s what he says. . .

❖ “As an Apostle, I have certain rights and freedoms. . .” vv. 1-14

Rights coming from apostolic authority, vv. 1-6

Rights illustrated in everyday life (common sense), v. 7

Rights granted by Scriptural principles, vv. 8-12

Rights given by God’s design, v. 13, 14

❖ “Which I willingly give up for the sake of the gospel.” vv. 15-27

In order to “offer the gospel without charge,” he has refused support from those he evangelized. vv. 15-18

In order to “save some,” he practices flexibility in varied situations. vv. 19-23

In order to “win the prize” (finish according to the rules), he exercises self-control. vv. 24-27

**Growth Principle #11 The spiritually mature Christian disciplines himself, by giving up rather than claiming, his rights for the sake of the gospel.**

**That’s an Apostle talking. But does this principle apply to us today? Yes! By teaching us that. . .**

***1. Our freedom comes from giving up rights, not demanding them.***

To serve others, we must first be free of demanding they serve us. Otherwise, we are in bondage to the idea that others “must come through” for us, and we are angry, bitter, and joyless when they don’t. Jesus showed the way here. Philippians 2:1-11. Are you free from insisting that others serve you?

***2. Our intensity (persistence) comes from having a purpose greater than self.***

When we are truly free, our lives can concentrate on serving others. Love expands your soul; selfish-ness shrinks it. Proverbs 23:1-8. Do you have a vision of life large enough to sustain you for a lifetime?

***3. Our focus comes from realizing we can set goals only for ourselves.***

Freedom means we no longer have to manipulate others to do our bidding. Has your joy evaporated because your heart’s desire is dependent upon others? Romans 14:4; 1 Corinthians 4:3-5.

***4. Our stability comes from knowing the very mind of God.***

When God’s purpose becomes ours, we cannot fail! God’s purpose is to glorify Himself in the salvation of sinners. Is that your work, too? Ephesians 4:14.

***5. Our success comes from God-empowered, grace-based self-discipline.***

Paul knew he was no longer “under the Law,” but he knew that the fruit of the Spirit was self-control. Galatians 5:22, 23. Are you self-disciplined or self-enslaved?

***Going Deeper--For Growth Groups:***



1. What is the difference between serving others and enabling others in bad behaviors? How can we tell the difference between serving and “being used” by manipulative people?

2. What is the difference between the self-discipline Paul practices and the legalism the Pharisees practiced? How do grace and The Cross enter into these questions?