

This Changes Everything

Week 4: From Rights to Responsibilities

1 Corinthians 8 and 9

There are some people who have green thumbs and some who do not. I'll let you guess which category me and Amber fall into.

After Easter, we grabbed a few plants that we had around the church and took them home. They were beautiful and fragrant. Added so much warmth and color. 3 weeks later...this is what they look like. Dried up and dead. Brittle. I asked Sherry Fichtner how hers was doing and she was like, "It's doing okay" and she sent a picture of it green and lush and growing. She said, "I'm about to plant it into the ground" and I'm like, "I'm about to throw ours into the trash!"

We're three weeks past Easter. The day when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus that changed everything. But, has it changed anything in you? Is the resurrection growing in your life, or three weeks later, has it withered away like this plant?

I think if the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is growing in us, one of the ways it'll be seen is in how we use the rights and freedoms that we have in Christ. Freedom was a big deal to Jesus. It's at the heart of the Gospel. Early in his ministry, Jesus said he came to proclaim freedom to the captives. Freedom for those held in bondage by their sin and shame. Freedom to walk in a relationship with God and have confidence in his love for us.

Later, Jesus says that if he sets us free, then we are free indeed! We are free from God's wrath. Free from the fear of death. Free from the weight of legalism. And, if we are free, then we have the right, in Christ, to live in that freedom. We have the right to proclaim God's grace over us and not be judged or condemned by others. We are no longer bound by the law, but set free by the grace of God, freely given to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

All of these freedoms and rights belong to us because of the Gospel. And, the way we use those rights and those freedoms speaks volumes about how the Gospel is growing in us, or if it's withering away. And, I believe, there are times when **the Gospel compels us to lay down our rights and take up our responsibilities.**

You see, when we start following Jesus, we remove ourselves from being the center of the universe. From being #1. Jesus now sits in that seat and we follow him. And, the path of Jesus leads us to self-denial. And, often times, self-denial requires us to lay down our rights and take up our responsibilities.

As with all things, Jesus is our example in this. The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 2...(READ Phil. 2:5-8)

Jesus had all the rights of God and he had enjoyed those rights for all eternity. He was not limited by time and space. Thousands of angels stood ready to move at his command. He was

worshipped and served. These were his rights as God, but instead of holding onto those rights, Jesus laid them down and took on flesh. He took on the responsibility of taking our sin to the cross so that we could be forgiven. So we could find freedom and enjoy the rights of being children of God.

And, as the Holy Spirit shapes us into the image of Christ, we start to reflect his attitude and actions. As we become more like Jesus, and the Gospel grows in us, we demonstrate the same willingness he had to lay down our rights and take up our responsibilities.

Paul spends a few chapters in the middle of his letter to the Corinthians to talk about this. If you have a Bible or a Bible app you like to use, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 9. His main point in this section that spans from chapters 8 - 10 is that **The rights we have in Jesus are secondary to the responsibility we have to help others find and follow him.**

In other words, our rights and freedoms in Christ take a backseat to the responsibility we have to lead others to Jesus. To help their faith flourish and grow. And, he talks about this in light of a number of things. Paul spends most of chapter 8 addressing their right to eat meat that was sacrificed to pagan gods, but that they have the responsibility to avoid it if it causes a brother or sister in Christ to stumble in their faith or slip back into idol worship.

In chapter 9, he talks about his right as an Apostle to make a living preaching the Gospel, but that he's given up that right so as to not be a burden to the Corinthians. And, as he continues to work this out in chapter 9, Paul tells us how he uses his freedom in Christ to advance the Gospel. How he lays down his rights so that more people can find and follow Jesus. This same Jesus who changed his life and will change theirs, too. Look at our text with me. **1 Corinthians 9:19-22...(READ)**

Paul makes it clear that his ultimate goal is to win people to Jesus. In fact, he uses the word "win" five times in these four verses. He wants to bring as many people as possible to a saving faith in Jesus. That's his passion and purpose. And, he's so committed to it that he's willing to give up his rights and freedoms and make himself subject to others if it means showing them the love of Jesus.

Someone said that Paul's method for reaching people can be described as "Faithful Flexibility." When it comes to relating to the people he's trying to reach, Paul is extremely flexible in his behavior and words and preferences, even while remaining completely faithful to Jesus. He didn't want any unnecessary obstacle to get in the way of people coming to Christ, so he was willing to adapt his approach to those he was trying to reach.

I think a principle we can glean from this is that **Followers of Jesus build bridges to reach people, not walls to keep them out.** We must be willing to meet people where they are and build bridges of trust and empathy and respect, not walls of judgement or fear that can become a barrier to someone finding Jesus. In these verses, Paul gives us some examples of how he does this with people he shares the Gospel with.

He says to the Jews, he became like a Jew. He became like one living under the law, even though he now lives in the freedom of grace. And this is astounding because some of Paul's strongest words are spent talking about the freedom we have in Christ, and that we're no longer bound by the Law! Now, he says "if I can lead someone to Christ by laying down my rights, I'm going to do it! If I can build a bridge to them by participating in a ceremonial washing, or observing a holy day, fine! Whatever it takes!"

In Acts 21, we read about Paul shaving his head and joining a group of Jewish men in their purification rites in an attempt to build a bridge for the sake of the Gospel. That's flexibility! But, in faithfulness, Paul wouldn't have done anything that directly conflicted with the Gospel he came to preach. Like, he wouldn't go join them in a for the atonement of their sin. That would have compromised his message of grace through Christ alone.

In verse 21 he says that to the Gentiles, those not under the law, he became like a Gentile. Paul would adapt his words to reach a different audience. The message of Jesus would still be the same, but how he presented it would look different because they didn't know the Scriptures. They didn't have the reference points that Paul and his Jewish audience did.

In Acts 17, we see him quote some of their own philosophers to build bridges to Jesus. That's flexibility. But, in faithfulness, Paul knows that, while he's no longer under the Jewish law, he is under the law of Christ, which means that Jesus is his Lord and he follows Him. The Gospel is his guide, not the culture.

So, even though he lives like one outside of the law, he's not lawless. Paul's not going to say, "To the thief, I became like a thief so I could tell him about the riches of Christ while we stole purses and wallets!"

In trying to win people to Christ, Paul's not going to conform so much that his life and message is indistinguishable from the culture around him. But, where appropriate, and when it's an indifferent matter, Paul's willing to toss aside his rights and freedoms, and even some of his convictions, if it means helping someone find and follow Jesus. He would go out of his way to take part in the culture around him if it means shinning the light of Christ into the darkness of their world.

Michael Green (*no relation*) writes, "Paul would have been as active in evangelizing skinheads as undergraduates. He would have been as much at home talking of Christ in the local bar as the open air of a dinner party."

Paul had a way of relating the Gospel to people. Building bridges to them and tearing down any walls that might keep them from finding and following Jesus. And, he tells us why in verse 23. He says...(READ 1 Cor. 9:23)

Paul uses his freedom in Christ to make himself a servant to all so that some might be saved and transformed by Jesus. As one commentary says, "In the final analysis, it is the Gospel that determines conduct."

If we want to know how to live or act in a certain situation, how to reach people for Christ, all we have to do is look to the life of Jesus and allow that to guide us. Jesus emptied himself of his rights and freedoms, he made himself nothing, and came to serve us. He built bridges to us and tore down walls that kept us from the Father. And he sent us out to do the same. And, I'll tell you, I see this all the time around here.

Adalyn, our oldest, is going into 6th grade, which means she's going to be in our Middle School Ministry soon. On Friday night, Grant and a group of adult leaders did a Middle Mayhem event and invited incoming 6th graders to join them so they could get a taste of what Middle School ministry is like.

And, when I dropped her off, I couldn't help but notice a group of young adult leaders who were right in there playing games with the kids and having a good time. They had every right and freedom to use their Friday night however they wanted, and yet to our Middle Schoolers, they became like a Middle Schooler in hopes that they might win some to Jesus.

And, let me tell you, having served as a Middle School Minister for 5 years, there's an extra crown in Heaven for people who volunteer in that ministry! But, they do it for the sake of the Gospel. To share in its joy and blessing.

Last week I heard about a mom in our church whose daughter plays softball. Many of the girls on her team don't follow Jesus or go to church anywhere, so this mom decided to intentionally pour into them. For a while now, she's sent a message to the other moms and offers to pick up any girl that wants to go to church or Campus Life with them. She doesn't have to do that, and I imagine it adds some strain to an already full calendar.

But, several months, and many miles later, one of those girls made the decision last week to start following Jesus. To these kids, this mom became like an Uber driver, in hopes that some might find and follow Jesus.

When it comes to our rights and responsibilities, the Gospel is our guide. Jesus is our example of laying it all down for the sake of others to experience the love of the Father. S

o, I wonder this morning if there's something Jesus is calling you to lay down in order to help someone else find and follow Jesus? Maybe it's a night of the week to lead or join a connect group. Maybe it's some of your time to serve in a ministry or pour into a friend or neighbor.

And, yes, it might cost you something. Self-denial always does. But, as Paul says, we do it for the sake of the Gospel and so we may share in the blessing of God's grace growing in us. We may share in the joy of seeing others find and follow Jesus.

As we lay down our rights and pick up our responsibilities, we embody the Gospel, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We live it out and it lives in us, growing and bearing fruit.

So, may we view the rights we have in Jesus as secondary to the responsibility we have to help others find and follow him.

May we be a church that builds bridges to help people experience Jesus, not walls to keep them away.

And, may the power of the resurrection give us the power and grace we need to become all things to all people so that by all possible means, we might bring more to Jesus and the joy of a life lived in Him.

And, if you're ready to find the freedom and new life that Jesus has for you, we'd love to help you take your next steps.