

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS: AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

IV. PAUL REPLIES TO THE LETTER FROM CORINTH (CH. 7:1-16:14)

(Continued)

(c) *Paul's defence of his apostolic claims (Ch. 9:1-27)*

SO! I am "not free", am I? I am "no apostle", am I? Listen! Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you Corinthian Christians not the fruit of my work by the Lord's power? To others, perhaps, I may be "no apostle"; but in your eyes I can never be anything else. Why, you — believers in Christ as you are — are the confirmation which seals the reality of my apostleship.

Here is my answer to those who scrutinize my claims in this connexion. Have we no authority to eat or drink? Have we no authority to take a believing wife around with us on our missionary journeys, as the other apostles do, and the Lord's brothers as well — yes, even Peter himself? Or are Barnabas and I the only ones who are not exempt from the necessity of earning our bread by our own exertions? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard but has no right to eat the grapes? Or who is there who tends a flock but cannot drink their milk? Is this a merely human argument that I am putting forward? Does not the Law teach the same thing? In Moses' law these words are written: "Thou shalt not muzzle an ox when he is treading out the corn."¹ Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Is not the truth rather that He says this for our sakes? Yes, it was written for our sakes, because the ploughman ought to plough in hope, and the thresher ought to thresh in hope of a share in the grain.

We sowed a good crop among you — a spiritual crop. Is it a great matter that we should reap a material harvest from you? If others are entitled to benefit from you in this way, are we not much more entitled to do so? We are; but we did not avail ourselves of this right. We prefer to put up with all manner of things, so as to place no hindrance in the path of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who serve in a temple get their living from the temple — that those who tend the altar have a share in what the

¹ Deut. 2: 4.

altar provides? In the same way the Lord laid it down that those who proclaim the gospel should have their living from the gospel. But I have not availed myself of any of these rights.

Now, I am not writing this in order that henceforth I may be supported by you for my apostolic work. Far from it; I would sooner die than let anyone deprive me of this ground for boasting. What do I mean by saying this? I mean this: if I proclaim the gospel, I have no ground for boasting in that. In that respect I am under compulsion; it will be the worse for me if I do not proclaim the gospel. If I proclaim it willingly — well, I have my reward. But if I do it only unwillingly, this is a responsibility with which I have been entrusted, and I have to discharge it none the less. What then is the reward of which I speak? It is this, that when I proclaim the gospel I can do so free of charge, so that I refrain from availing myself fully of my authority as a herald of the gospel.

I am no man's slave, but I have made myself a slave to all, in order to win the more for Christ. To the Jews I have made myself as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those who live under the law I have lived like one under the law, in order to win those who are under the law — not that I myself am under the law. Similarly, to those who live under no law I have come as one under no law, in order to win those who are under no law — not that I am really under no law in relation to God, for I am bound by the law of Christ. To those who are weak I have made myself weak, so as to win the weak; in fact, I have become all things to all people, in order that, one way or another, I may rescue some of them. But I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share its blessings with others.

You know very well, of course, that all the competitors in a foot-race run, but only one gains the prize. You run your race, therefore, in such a way as to win. Everyone who participates in an athletic contest disciplines his whole course of life. Now *they* do this in order to win a material wreath, but we have a wreath of immortality as our prize. And that is why I run an undeviating course with my eye fixed on the tape; my boxing is no shadow-boxing. I discipline my body strictly and keep it under, in case I myself should be disqualified after I have acted as herald, proclaiming the rules to others.

(d) *Further Warning against Idolatry (Ch. 10:1-11:1)*

i. *The Example of the Israelites (Ch. 10:1-13)*

Here is something, my brothers, that I want you to keep in mind. All our forefathers were covered by the cloud, they all

passed through the sea, they were all baptized as Moses' followers in the cloud and in the sea, they all ate the same supernatural bread, and they all drank the same supernatural water. I am not here thinking of the material rock; I mean rather that they drank from the supernatural rock which accompanied them in their wilderness wanderings — that rock was Christ Himself. Yet the majority of them incurred God's displeasure, and they fell dead in the wilderness.

Now all these things which befell them serve as warnings for us, so that we should not lust after evil things as they did. You must not go on in idolatrous ways, as some of them did; you remember the scripture: "The people sat down to eat and drink, and then got up to play."² And don't let us be involved in illicit unions, as some of them did, and 23,000 died in a single day. Don't let us provoke the Lord to anger, as some of them did and were killed by the serpents. And don't be complainers, like some of them, who perished at the hand of the Destroyer.

Now, I repeat, these things happened to them by way of example for us, and they have been recorded for our instruction, for the fulfilment of all the ages has converged upon us.

So then, if anyone thinks that he is securely established, let him beware of falling. No trial, no temptation has come upon you that human nature in general is not exposed to. But you may safely put your trust in God, and count on Him not to let you be tried beyond your strength; on the contrary, along with the trial He will provide the way out, so that you can endure it successfully.

ii. *The Sanctity of the Lord's Table* (Ch. 10: 14-22)

I beg you therefore, my dear friends, keep away from idolatry. I am reasoning with you as wise men; judge if my argument is reasonable or not. What is the cup of thanksgiving over which we invoke the Lord's blessing? Is it not our participation in the blood of Christ? And as for the bread which we break, is that not our participation in the body of Christ? Of course it is; however many we are, we make up one loaf of bread, one body, for we all have a share of that one loaf of bread. Consider the earthly nation of Israel, and see what happens in their worship. Do not those who eat the sacrificed animals have communion with the altar?

Now what do I mean by this? Do I mean that there is anything special about the flesh of animals which have been offered in pagan worship, or that an idol has any real substance? No, but this is what I mean: when the pagans offer sacrifices, they offer them to

² Ex. 32: 6.

demons and not to the true God — and I don't want you to have any communion with demons! You cannot drink the Lord's cup and the cup of demons as well; you cannot partake of food from the Lord's table and from the table of demons too. Or are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

iii. *Liberty and Charity* (Ch. 10:23–11:1)

“All things are permissible,” you say — yes, but not all things are profitable. “All things are permissible” — yes, but all things don't build up a sound character. Each of you should look after his neighbour's well-being rather than his own.

If you want detailed advice, here it is. Eat whatever is sold in the flesh market, and don't inquire too closely into its origin on conscientious grounds. After all, “the earth belongs to the Lord, with everything that is in it.”³ If someone who is not a Christian invites you to a meal, and you are willing to go, then eat whatever food is set before you, and don't inquire too closely into its origin on conscientious grounds. But if someone says to you, “This is the flesh of an animal that was sacrificed in a pagan temple,” don't eat it — both for the sake of the person who has given you the information and on grounds of conscience too. I don't mean your own conscience but your neighbour's; why should my liberty have to abide the judgment of someone else's conscience? If I take the food with a grateful heart, why am I criticized for what I thank God for?

In short, whether it is a question of eating or drinking or anything else, do everything to God's glory, and try to put no stumbling-block in the way of any — Jews, Greeks or Church of God. That is my own policy: I try to please everybody in everything, and I don't aim at my own good but at the good of the masses, striving for their salvation. Do as I do, as I try to do what Christ does.

(To be continued)

³ Ps. 24: 1.