

20. Learning to Minister Through Sharing

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to avoid hindering the spiritual growth of others. We saw that true Christian love will lead us to avoid doing something that would cause a weaker brother to stumble even though that thing may not be sin. In our topic today, we are going to see that Paul gives us an example of the way to help our children learn to minister to others. Since the word “minister” means *to serve*, we see that we want to help our children learn how to serve others in their spiritual growth. That will be the focus of our topic today.

We have seen that many of the Corinthian Christians were spiritually weak. As a result, some of them even questioned whether Paul was an apostle. 1 Corinthians 9:1-2 says, “Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” Here, we see that Paul asks the people in Corinth four questions to make them think about what they were saying. This illustrates a very important principle for us. Many Christians that are still driven by fear are quick to judge others. Here, we see that one of the things that we can do to make them think about what they are saying is to ask them questions. Such questions will often cause people to think about what they are saying when they judge. Three of these questions are answered in this chapter.

The question that is not answered in this chapter is, Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? However, this question is answered in other parts of the New Testament. In Acts 9:1-7, we see how the Lord spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus. Verse 7 says, “And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.” The men with Paul heard the voice but did not see the speaker. This may indicate that Paul did see the speaker and that speaker was Jesus according to verse 5. Then, Galatians 1:15-17 says, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” Here, we see that Paul spent three years in Arabia learning how to share the Gospel with the Gentiles. Whether Paul saw the Lord both on the road to Damascus and also in Arabia we do not know but we do know that he says here that he saw the Lord.

The fourth question that Paul asked the Corinthian Christians is answered in verse two. Paul asked them, “Are you not my work in the Lord?” Paul said that even if he was not an apostle to others, he was an apostle to the Corinthians. The fact that the Lord had transformed their lives was the seal of his apostleship. That was due to the fact that the Lord had called Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Romans 1:5 says, “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name.” Paul told the Romans that he had received this apostleship through Christ and that the Lord had called him by grace to take the Gospel to all nations.

Paul then went on to explain that he was free. 1 Corinthians 9:3-7 says, “My defense to those who

examine me is this: Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or *is it* only Barnabas and I *who* have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?" Paul understood that Christian freedom gave him the opportunity to serve the Lord in several ways that were different from the other apostles. Paul was free to eat and drink the foods that he chose but said in chapter 8 that he was free not to eat if it would cause a weaker brother to stumble.

Paul said that he was free to marry but as he had explained in chapter 7 he was also free to be single so that he could take the Gospel to the Gentiles. In contrast, Peter took a wife with him as he traveled. In Mark 1:30, we see that Peter had a wife. That verse says, "But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once." Paul said that he and Barnabas were free to let the Lord provide what they needed to serve the Lord but when they were at Corinth they were also free to work to supply their own needs. Acts 18:3 says, "So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers." Here, we see that Paul had used his freedom in Christ to supply his own financial needs by making tents.

Paul pointed out that he was free to be supported in his ministry even though he had not used that freedom when he was in Corinth. Again, Paul showed this freedom to be supported in his ministry by several questions. Those who go to war are supported by their government. Those who plant a vineyard eat the fruit of the vineyard. Those who feed a flock drink the milk of the flock. Paul told the Galatians in Galatians 6:6, "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches." Here, we see that it is fine for those who are taught the Word of God to share with those who teach them.

In fact, the Philippians shared with Paul more than once to help him in his ministry. Philippians 4:14-17 says, "Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account." Paul pointed out that the Philippians had used their freedom to send support to Paul even though they were a very poor church. Paul had great freedom but he did not use that freedom for his own benefit but instead chose to make tents while he was in Corinth.

Paul also pointed out that in the Old Testament God had given instructions about the way to supply the needs of those who worked. First, he used the illustration of how God supplied the needs of the animals that worked. 1 Corinthians 9:8-9 says, "Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.' Is it oxen God is concerned about?" In the law, God had said that they could not put a muzzle on an ox when the ox was working to tread out the grain. This made it possible for the ox to eat some of the grain as he was treading out the grain. Here, we see that God even included in the law instructions that made it possible for an ox to eat the grain as he served his master. Then, Paul asked another question. Paul asked if God gave those instructions

in the law just for the sake of the ox.

Paul answers this question in 1 Corinthians 9:10-11 where we read, “Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, *is it* a great thing if we reap your material things?” Here, Paul said that God gave the instructions about the ox as an example for us today. The ox that was doing the work of his master was to be allowed to eat by his master as he worked. This meant that the ox could have hope as he worked because he knew that the master was providing him with food as he worked. When the ox plowed, he could plow in hope. When the ox threshed by treading out the grain, he could eat some of the grain that he was threshing. Paul said that this was actually instructions for our sakes. Then, Paul went on to explain what he meant.

Paul and Barnabas had come to Corinth and shared the Word of God with the people in Corinth. Instead of planting a field, they were planting spiritual seeds as they shared the Word of God. Psalm 126:5-6 says, “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves *with him.*” Paul would have been very familiar with these verses from Psalm 126. Paul had been sowing the Word of God as he shared the Gospel with the people in Corinth. Paul also shed many tears for the people in the various cities where he preached the Gospel. However, he was looking forward to the day when he would stand before the Lord with rejoicing because of the people who had become Christians as he had shared the Gospel with them. This is what he meant when he said that he and Barnabas had sown spiritual things.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children also understand that we have been given great freedom to share the Gospel with those who have not placed their trust in Christ. Just like Paul, we want to help them understand that they can be free to share the Gospel whether or not they are paid to serve the Lord. We want them to understand the great joy that they will have as they stand before the Lord with the people who they have led to Christ. That in itself is such a great privilege that we can thank the Lord for the freedom we have to share the Gospel with those who do not know Christ.

Paul did ask another question. He asked the Corinthians if it would be right for him to share their material things for his ministry. He answered this question in verse 15 when he said, “But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it *would be* better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.” Paul had the freedom to be paid for sharing the Gospel but he had not expected the Corinthians to pay him. We want to help our children realize that they are free to follow the example of Paul and serve the Lord both by serving and sharing. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to minister.