

1 Corinthians 9:1-18 – “Laying Down My Rights”

In Chapter 8 we looked at how there are times we may need to give up an individual right or freedom for the sake of another. It's being led by the law of love. Now in Chapter 9, Paul is going to give an example from his own life of giving up a right for the benefit of others. But which right? The right to be supported as an apostle. But first he had to declare his authority and apostleship since it had been brought into question. We'll see these things in this chapter.

1. Paul's Defense of Apostleship – 9:1-6

9:1 - *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?*

The church in Corinth had no problem supporting various teachers. This was something they were well accustomed to. As we go through this passage we'll see very clearly that Paul is making an argument for teachers to be supported by those that benefit from them, but he's also stating how he laid down his right to be supported by the church in Corinth so that there would be no hindrance to them receiving the gospel.

But it seemed that with Paul doing this, some in the church began to question Paul's authority as an apostle. He certainly wasn't exercising some of his rights that they thought should coincide with that of an apostle. So, Paul poses 4 questions in this opening verse – four rhetorical questions that are written in such a way in the Greek that demand a positive 'yes' answer.

Am I not an apostle? Absolutely Paul was. An apostle was one that was commissioned; sent out by Jesus on a mission. Some thought that since Paul wasn't part of the original 12 he didn't qualify. But we know very clearly that Paul was called by Jesus for a specific purpose of proclaiming the Gospel (Acts 9:15).

Am I not free? You bet he was. Yet because Paul chose to refer to himself as a servant, others looked down on him. There were those in Corinth that believed if you were intended to have any responsibility in the church, then it was your right to treat others as slaves, and not act like one yourself. They questioned Paul because he seemed “too ‘weak’, too ‘soft’, too willing to deny himself his freedom in Christ for the sake of others.”^{1 1}

¹ If this seems to be a caricature, we only have to read 2 Cor. 10:7–11:15.

¹ Prior, D. (1985). *The message of 1 Corinthians: life in the local church* (pp. 150–151). InterVarsity Press.

Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Over and over again we see that one of the requirements of an apostle was that they were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus Christ. Now how could Paul fulfill this if he became a Christian after Jesus died and rose again? Because Jesus met him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:5-6). Paul was off to persecute these Christian believers, but Jesus stopped him, revealed Himself to Paul, and Paul became not only a believer but one of the greatest apostles of all.

Are you not my work in the Lord? All Paul had to do was have them look at what has taken place in Corinth. This sinful, corrupt, pagan city has now seen a church birthed there. People have been saved and lives have been transformed because Paul went and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ there. The proof of his apostleship is in the changed lives of the Corinthians.

- **1 Corinthians 4:15**, *"For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."*

9:2 - *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.*

Paul says here that others may not see him as an apostle, but there's no doubt he is to the church in Corinth. The fruit that has come here by way of the work Paul has poured in is proof of his apostleship!

But none of these things really changed the mind of his critics. And this isn't so much a chapter on Paul defending his apostleship, but rather him giving an illustration of the rights he could have claimed because of his position but chose to surrender for the sake of others.

So, with that he launches into another series of questions meant to stir his readers to see what he was giving up. Again, these questions are asked with the assumed positive response.

9:3-6 - *My defense to those who examine me is this: ⁴ Do we have no right to eat and drink? ⁵ Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?*

Paul had every right to receive financial remuneration from those he was teaching and pastoring. When Jesus sent out the 70, he told them to freely eat what was set before them; they deserve it:

- **Luke 10:5–8**, *"But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.'⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you.⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house.⁸ Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you."*

Paul will later say in this chapter that *'those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel'* (9:14).

So, with Paul being a worker for the Lord, and commissioned by the Lord, he had every right to be compensated through financial and practical provision.

Do we have no right to take a long a believing wife...? Provision was not only made for the one doing the work, but there was also spousal support given. An apostle could take their wife with them on the journey who would not only be a help to the apostle, but a blessing to others along the way too.

Paul had every right to have a wife with him, but he too laid down this right and continued on in singlehood, and with a singleness of mind.

- Other apostles were married and their wives accompanied them in the ministry and were provided for.

Now this one verse (vs. 5) is a real problem for the catholic church. They promote Peter as the first pope, but yet we're told that Peter (***Cephas***) was married (Mark 1:29-31). To have a married pope isn't exactly catholic.

The catholic church also teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary. Yet we read here that Jesus had brothers. This would be speaking of James and Jude, the half-brothers of Jesus, who got saved after Jesus' resurrection and were faithful teachers of the gospel.

Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Paul comes across almost sarcastically here wondering if he and Barnabas are the only ones that need to continue to work just to eat. Everyone else is able to focus solely on the ministry, but Paul must hold down a steady job just to carry the ministry.

- Now remember, this is exactly what he did (Acts 18:3-4). Not because he needed to, but because he chose to.

This kind of reasoning does not line up with what we see in the natural world. Paul will go on to share 3 examples from everyday life of people that will benefit through the work they do:

1. A Soldier
2. A Farmer
3. A Shepherd

2. Paul's Rights of Apostleship – 9:7-18

9:7 - *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?*

Could you imagine if a soldier was enlisted to fight for his country and he needed to cover all his costs? What kind of person would want to risk his life and have to pay for it too? Could you imagine a soldier getting wounded on the battlefield and as they're taking him to the medical tent someone is asking if he's been able to pay off his loan for the army starter pack yet?

And a person that is tending to the plants in a vineyard, do you think they're not going to pluck a grape or two? I'm gonna pluck a grape or two from a vineyard that isn't mine, let alone one that I own.

And if you're overseeing a flock of animals, you can sure bet you're going to enjoy some of their milk. Remember this is being written when you didn't have the luxury of running down to the grocery store to stock up on milk. You needed a little top up on your Froot Loops, you're gonna step out of your tent and call the nearest goat over. You're not gonna be asking any questions of ethics or rights.

9:8-10 - *Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? ⁹ 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? ¹⁰ 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.*

Paul says here that these rights expressed from everyday life are no mere human opinions, because the Scriptures back up these very same principles.

So Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4 to show how even oxen are allowed to eat of the grain while it is breaking it down. Don't put a muzzle on it, let it enjoy the fruit of its labour.

Now did God communicate this principle because he was totally worried about the oxen getting enough food? Not entirely, He certainly cares for the oxen, but how much more does He care for us! This principle is doubly applicable to those faithful ministers of God. Christian service is often likened to that of plowing and threshing. 1 Corinthians 3 discussed how some plant, and some water. We should never do these things as a 'job', yet there is a blessing that comes for all when that spiritual labourer labours in hope of support.

9:11-12 - *If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? ¹² If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.*

Again, Paul had every right to expect to be compensated for the way he was serving others and feeding others spiritually. When you enjoy a nice meal at a restaurant it would be wrong to walk out and go the restaurant across the street to pay your bill. Yet many are doing that in how they are happy to support other things or people, but not where they are being fed.

- **Galatians 6:6–10**, *“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. ⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*

Now remember, Paul isn't trying to guilt this church into giving him remuneration. He's not arguing for a raise, he's laying all this out to show how he had every right and liberty to receive compensation, but he denied himself that right. He laid down his liberty for the blessing of others. He wanted the gospel to go out unhindered.

- Just as we have seen in our day, Paul saw as well in his day those that were coming onto the scene as great spiritual leaders, but they're desire was more about fleecing the flock than feeding the flock. They wanted to fatten themselves. People have used verses like this to have others empty their pockets so they can fill their own.
- It was because of these things that Paul looked to run in the opposite view and not even receive support from the Corinthians.

We are often asked about offerings here at Calvary Chapel. Why don't we pass a plate around to receive a collection? We certainly believe that Christians should give, and this is a part of our worship, but we don't want people to come into this church and feel like we're just wanting their money. I mean we do, but we don't want that to be front and center. So, we put offering boxes around so that people can give as they're led. We want people to give cheerfully and not by compulsion.

9:13-14 - *Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? ¹⁴ Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*

Paul again gives another example from Scripture to show how it was common place for other ministers to be blessed and compensated in their service for the Lord. This time it's the example of the priests. They served in the temple and when worshippers would bring sacrifices, the priests were to take a portion for themselves. They'd get their pay through a side of lamb chops.

- This applies to New Testament pastors – they are to be paid from the monetary gifts offered to God by His worshippers.
- Paul says this is what the Lord has commanded (Matthew 10:10: Luke 10:7-8; 1 Timothy 5:18).

9:15 - *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 has given 5 arguments to make the case for the right of the worker to receive support: 1. Common Practice (9:7) 2. Scriptural Precept (9:8-10) 3. Intrinsic Justice (9:11-12) 4. Jewish Custom (9:13) 5. Christ's Command (9:14). But he's not laying these things out to urge the Corinthians to begin to support him; this wasn't a hint. Nor was he boasting in a proud way of presenting the

gospel free of charge. The word **boasting** means ‘to glory’ or ‘rejoice’. He was rejoicing that he could preach and pastor and support himself while doing it.

9:16-17 - *For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.*

Again, there’s no boasting in preaching the gospel – this is what he’s been called to! He’s not doing it to pile away a bunch of savings and retire early. It’s not about the money for Paul, it’s about the necessity of sharing this good news that he has been entrusted with as a steward.

Paul states that if he were doing this simply as an occupation (**willingly**) he had a right to compensation (**a reward**). But he says, **if against my will** – again speaking of the fact that he was called to do this – he couldn’t prevent it. So he says, **I’ve been entrusted with a stewardship...** he saw his relationship as that of a servant before a great Master (God). And Paul knew his Lord would provide for him.

9:18 - *What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.*"

Paul’s reward was that he can deliver the Good News without any possible hindrance or stumbling block. This is what Paul was living for; to share his faith, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This was reward enough for him!

So again, Paul is presenting this case of how he has laid down his own rights for the betterment of others. Now some may think he’s against preachers being supported, and some of you may agree with this thinking. But Paul elsewhere had indeed taken support from the church.

- **Philippians 4:16–17**, "*For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.*"
- **2 Corinthians 11:8**, "*I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.*"

It’s not wrong to pay your pastors – **those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel** (9:14).

I'm thankful for the support here at Riverside. This isn't something I do to receive a salary, but I'm not ashamed to receive a salary so that I can be available to study, teach God's Word and care for the flock of God here.

When we started the church I did not want to receive any salary. I worked full time like Paul did to balance things out. Over the years we were able to grow into pastoral support for the church. And we're grateful for the work that can be done here at Riverside through your generous support! Thank you.