

Chapter 9

Financially Support the Work the Ministry

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul gave reasons why he has a right to be supported financially, but in this case, he gave up that right so that no one will think he preached and taught for money.

Those Ministering to Us Have the Right to Be Financially Supported

Verse 1—Paul advances his argument about how he personally limited his liberty as an apostle for the sake of the weaker brother.

- He used a series of rhetorical questions, each expecting a ‘yes’ answer to illustrate this.
- *Am I not free?* Certainly he enjoyed the liberty that every other believer had.
- *Am I not an apostle?* He also possessed the rights and privileges of one sent by Christ, an apostle.
- If Christian liberty applied to the Corinthians, the fruit of his labor, how much more can he claim not only Christian, but additionally apostolic liberty.
- The evidence of his apostleship included having *seen Jesus our Lord* on the Damascus road (9:3-5; Acts 22:14-15).
- The Corinthian believers themselves were further evidence of his apostleship. *Are you not my work in the Lord?* (Romans 15:15-21). The people in Corinth who came to Christ were his work.

Verse 2—Paul’s liberty and authority should be patently obvious to the Corinthians, *if to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you* (the Corinthians).

- They themselves were the proof that he was an apostle, *for you are the seal* (σφραγίς inscription, signet ring) *of my apostleship in the Lord*.
- Seals were used to guarantee the authenticity of letters or merchandise.
- These Corinthian believers were evidence that Paul’s apostleship was genuine.

Verse 3—Apparently, some were beginning to question Paul as an apostle.

- *My defense* (ἀπολογία a reasoned argument, to make a case) *to those who examine me is this*, which he also vigorously defends later in 2 Corinthians chapters 10–13.
- Paul suggested he’s on trial, or that he has already been “found guilty” by the Corinthian Christians.
- Paul had his critics, just as Jesus did, as well as many who serve the Lord.

Verse 4—Paul, as an apostle serving the Lord, had a right to accept financial support for his ministry at Corinth. *Do we not have a right* (ἐξουσίαν freedom or liberty) *to eat and drink?*

- It wasn’t that the Corinthian Christians questioned Paul’s right to eat, but Paul meant that he has the right to eat and drink at the expense of the churches he served.

Verse 5—Evidently it was customary for the other apostles and the Lord’s physical brothers to take their wives with them when they traveled to minister.

- *Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife?* Paul had the right to do so as well as *the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas*.
- Most likely, Peter (Cephas) is mentioned because he had a strong following in the Corinthian church (1:12).

Verse 6—Paul had an ally in refusing the right to receive financial support from the church *or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?*

- Barnabas and Paul were partners in the first missionary journey and apparently gave up the right to be supported by the people they served.

- This may have contributed to the Corinthian attitude that Paul was not equal with the other apostles.

Verse 7—Paul uses six arguments to make his case that those who work have a right to receive pay. Paul could have had forced the issue of financial support from the Corinthians.

- **First**, it is **customary** to be paid for work like a *soldier* paid for his service, or one *who plants a vineyard* eating the fruit of his labor, or one *who tends a flock* using its *milk*. So, too, those in the service of the Lord have a right to financial support. It should not seem strange to the Corinthian Christians that Paul has the right to be supported by the people he ministers to.

Verse 8—**Second**, the previous argument was based on human logic *according to human judgment*.

- God’s provision in **the Law** also makes this case. The Old Testament Law justified receiving a salary. Paul’s right is also stated in the Mosaic Law.
- He appeals to Scripture, not only human illustrations.

Verse 9—That case was based in Deuteronomy 25:4, *you shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing*, to indicate that remunerating an ox certainly justifies financially supporting God’s servant’s.

- The point is not that God is *concerned about oxen*, but God’s concern is that Christian leaders are supported for their labor in ministry.

Verse 10—This principle of feeding oxen in the Old Testament is God’s way of showing the principle of the need for financial support of individuals in ministry today. *Yes, for our sake it was written*.

- The reason for this financial support is *because the plowman ought to plow in hope* (ἐλπιδι confident expectation), *and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops*.
- So, too, those in the service of the Lord should expect to be financially supported.
- Those who benefit should also financially support it.

Verse 11—**Third**, the **greater** *if we sowed spiritual things in you* are inherently more valuable than the **lesser** *is it too much if we reap material things from you?*

- The former has eternal value, while the latter only temporary.
- Since spiritual and eternal things are much more important, it’s also a great thing for the Corinthians to supply the apostle’s financial needs.

Verse 12—**Fourth**, the **priority** of planting the group of Corinthian believers established Paul’s right to be supported *if others share the right over you, do we not more?*

- Paul did not insist on the right to that financial support *nevertheless, we did not use this right*.
- He chose rather to support himself so as not to suffer unfair criticism and *cause no hindrance* (ἐγκοπήν a cutting in a road to impede pursuit) *to the gospel of Christ*.
- Paul was the founding father but relinquished their support to avoid being a stumbling block to any.
- False apostles were using Paul to leverage their own support.

Verse 13—**Fifth**, the **practice** of the priesthood legitimized his financial support from the Corinthians.

- *Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?*
- The temple priests and Levite workers of the Old Testament received material aid for their ministry (Numbers 18:8-24). It was a common practice that those who served the altar received material benefits for their service as they ate sacrifices offered on the altar (Deuteronomy 18:1-8).

Verse 14—**Sixth**, Paul appealed to **Jesus’ teaching** to strengthen his argument for Corinthian support of his ministry.

- *So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel*.

- Jesus Christ commanded the right of financial support in ministry sending the disciples out to serve *carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals* (Luke 10: 4,7).
- In Matthew 10:10, Jesus said, “*for a worker is worthy of his food.*”
- Christ taught the same right to be supported.
- Jesus practiced the same for His ministry.

Those Ministering Do So Not for Payment but from Compulsion

Verse 15—The apostle had the right to be financially supported, but he did not use it. *But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case.*

- He had made the decision to support himself while he preached and discipled freely.
- Paul said, “*it would be better for me to die*” as an extreme but genuine outcome he envisioned, *than have any man make my boast an empty one* about offering the gospel free of charge, even though as an apostle he had the right to such support from the Corinthians.

Verse 16—There is no pride of achievement for preaching the gospel.

- *For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of*, since he did not create the gospel message but just proclaimed it.
- Actually, the apostle had no choice but to proclaim it, *for I am under compulsion* (ἀνάγκη necessity or constraint); *for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel* (εὐαγγελίζομαι to bring good news), which was God’s testimony about the crucified Christ (1:6).
- He was duty bound to deliver this news to the Corinthian people.

Verse 17—So, for Paul, it came down to either preaching the gospel *voluntarily*, for which he would receive *a reward*, *but if against my will*, then it would simply be doing his duty as *a stewardship* (οἰκονομίαν management of a household) *entrusted to me*.

- Since he was only discharging his duty, he had no claim to special recompense, because the gospel was a sacred trust to him from Christ.

Verse 18—*What then is my reward* (it was not money) *...when I preach the gospel* is a legitimate question to ask, since a profit motive is a godly one.

- It was the privilege of preaching the gospel without cost to the hearers, that *I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*
- Paul not only had the freedom to insist on his rights as an apostle, he also had the right not to insist on them.
- He was independent of all human pressure in the exercise of his right to receive financial support or not.

Verse 19—Paul was *free from all men* in the sense that he was not a slave to any other human being.

- However, as God’s ‘galley slave’ (4:1) he was *free to make myself a slave* (ἐδούλωσα reduce to bondage) *to all*.
- Specifically, he was God’s ‘galley slave’ so he could be bound by God to serve the Corinthians.
- The purpose of this enslavement was *so that I may win* (κερδήσω gain or acquire) *more* to the gospel.
- Genuine freedom is found in bondage to Christ. It is serving people, rather than lording it over them, that is the means of winning them.

Verse 20—Paul speaks of four groups of people he hoped to *gain* for the gospel.

- He accommodated these groups, not by compromising truth, but by adapting his methods so as to win them.

- He adapted himself to Jewish customs and dietary laws. *To the Jews I became a Jew* so to make them potentially receptive to him and his message *so I might win Jews*.
- He adapted himself to those *under the* (Mosaic) *Law* without compromising the gospel though *not being myself under the Law* believing he had no obligation to keep the Law *so that I might win those who are under the Law*.
- He even had Timothy circumcised at Lystra for this purpose (Acts 16:3).

Verse 21—He adapted himself to *those who are without law*, which included the Gentiles who did not follow the Mosaic Law.

- Paul was even willing to abandon Gentile scruples, like eating meat offered to idols, in order to win them to the gospel *as without law*.
- Gentiles were not *without the law of God*, but it was exemplified for them *under the law of Christ* for this present age, which is embodied within the New Testament.
- Today, believers do not perform the Old Testament Law, but since it reflects the mind of God, it should be applied.

Verse 22—Finally, Paul adapted himself *the weak... that I might win the weak* (ὀσθενέσιν without strength or feeble) who most likely were a category of unbelievers who had extremely sensitive consciences, which could hinder receiving the gospel if not accommodated in necessary ways.

- This policy was summarized this way by Paul *I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save* (σώσω to rescue or deliver) *some*.
- In the context, the purpose for Paul adapting himself was so as to bring people to the Savior through the preaching of the Gospel, God's testimony about Christ's crucifixion.

Verse 23—It was this gospel that served as the axis around which the apostle's life revolved. *I do all things for the sake of the gospel*.

- The purpose for doing so was *so that I may become a fellow partaker of it* in the sense that he could share in the spiritual harvest of people believing the gospel message, as well as growing in their faith.

Verse 24—Paul used an athletic metaphor to illustrate the personal discipline this course of ministry required. *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run*.

- While this is true, *only one receives the prize so run in such a way that you may win*.
- The point is, that every believer ought to run the race, that is, live their lives with eternal priorities in view, as Paul did, like one who is the winner, so they will receive a reward from the judge.
- You should be 'all in' with your discipleship.
- We compete with ourselves and that requires diligence, endurance, and discipline to stay faithful and focused.

Verse 25—Of course, this type of running or living takes effort. *Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things*.

- The word *competes* is ἀγωνιζόμενος from which we get the word 'agonizes' meaning 'to struggle' or 'contend' and indicates that receiving eternal rewards requires diligent effort due to all the variables in life that can prevent us from finishing well.
- Our rewards are not something temporal, like *a perishable wreath*, but *imperishable*, with enduring and eternal value.
- What we take with us at death is our discipleship, which is the basis of our examination by Christ.

Verse 26—The point is for believers to strain and strive in their Christian living to be rewarded by Christ. *Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim* with purpose, not aimlessly or halfheartedly.

- Believers should be so encapsulated by the prospect of being rewarded by Christ that like Paul, *I box in such a way, as not beating the air not flailing in life, but landing every punch they take as they labor for Christ.*

Verse 27—To achieve this level of determination required *I discipline* (ὀπωπιάζω to beat black and blue) *my body and make it my slave.*

- It is necessary to even discipline our physical bodies to accomplish the goal of being rewarded by Christ.
- This may require severe discipline, *so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified* (ἀδόκιμος not stand the test, not be approved) by losing eternal rewards.
- Salvation is a gift, but rewards are earned.
- Salvation is free, but we labor for rewards.
- God gives us His salvation, but He pays us for good works.
- It is a fearful thing to be disqualified for reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Luke 19:22; Hebrews 10:26-27; Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Application

1. One Biblical way to use your money, your wealth, your income is to give it to those who are serving the work of God's kingdom. The Biblical principle is to be generous, even sacrificial, in your giving. That is somewhat easier when you understand that all your wealth belongs to God, and you are simply a steward of His property, not a spender of yours.
2. As you serve people as part of your service for God's kingdom, do that service because you are passionate to participate with God in what it is He is doing and receive eternal rewards, not because you want to make a name for yourself or become wealthy doing it. Understand that this will require strict personal discipline of both spirit and body, the heart and the flesh. It will require all your diligence all of your days.