

The Book of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 9:1-14

Session 36: Paul as Our Example

1 Corinthians 9:1 Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?

When the false apostles came to Corinth after Paul had established the home churches around the city, they no doubt had designs on two things: 1) enriching themselves and, as ministers of the adversary, 2) pulling the saints away from Paul's doctrine. Now understand that Paul got there first. Finding that Paul had taken no money from the Corinthians either for himself or for the ministry, they craftily used this against Paul.

They boldly affirmed to the Corinthians that Paul was no apostle because he had not accompanied Christ during his earthly ministry, and the fact that Paul demanded no financial support from the Corinthians to sustain him, proved that Paul knew he was no apostle and therefore he had no right to their support. Their reasoning was, if Paul knew himself to be an Apostle, why did he not use the rights of an apostle?

1 Corinthians 9:2 If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for **the seal of mine apostleship are ye** in the Lord.

The "seal" of Paul's apostleship is that he was the one who showed up in Corinth to preach the gospel of Christ, he was the one who organized them into a church, he was the one inspired to write scripture.

1 Corinthians 9:3 Mine answer to **them that do examine me is this,**

Paul is being scrutinized by some in Corinth to decide whether they believe Paul's claims of apostleship; "them that do examine me." Paul's life, ministry, treatment of the church, it is all under the microscope.

Paul's answer to those who question his apostleship is:

1 Corinthians 9:4 Have we not power to eat and to drink?

The word “power” in this case means authority or privilege, to eat and drink *without secular employment*. Paul is saying, as an apostle of Christ, “Don’t I have the right to expect you Corinthians to support me (food, the necessities of life) without my having to work a separate, secular job?” By this question, Paul is not telling them something they didn’t already know. They are already aware of their obligation to support apostles.

1 Corinthians 9:5 Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and *as* the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?

Verse 5 demonstrates that ministers not only expected themselves to be supported, but also their family with them. Then Paul uses Peter (Cephas) as an example of this. So, the apostles certainly could marry and expect their wives to be supported with them.

1 Corinthians 9:6 Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?

Paul is asking, “Don’t Barnabas and I have the same privilege to be supported without us working a secular job, as the other apostles do?”

I want to pause here for a moment and make a point; there were times in Paul’s ministry where he made tents to support himself. This would have been especially true in the beginning before there were assemblies of believers who knew Paul and was ministered to by him. But there were other times when he did not, and this is one of those times.

When I was at seminary, I heard my professors insist that every pastor must be bi-vocational because Paul was. But Paul does not teach that every pastor must also work a secular job.

Let me ask you a question: Does a pastor have the liberty to work secularly while engaged in ministry? He does. Does he also have the liberty to forbear working secularly? He does.

And I have done both. I, like Paul, have worked full time in the ministry, and I have worked secularly when the church I pastored could not support me. I have

worked in Christian schools, I have laid carpet, I have worked for a medical equipment company, and I have had my own building maintenance business (which is a fancy term for a janitorial service) all while pastoring. Gratefully, I have worked for the last several decades as full-time in the ministry. Honestly, if I had to work a secular job, I don't think I could study and prepare like I do. But, you do what you have to do and you have the liberty to do so.

In vv. 7-13, Paul lists three vocations where the individual is supported in his labor.

1 Corinthians 9:7 **Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?**

The soldier doesn't go off to fight the war by paying for it himself, that would be unreasonable. What soldier pays for his own travel and food to the battlefield, buys his own ammunition, buys his own weapons, supplies his own uniform, brings his own tent, supplies his own medical supplies, brings his own doctor, etc.? What kind of army would you have if this was the case?

1 Corinthians 9:7 **Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?**

The farmer who plants the grapes, tends the vines, and harvests the grapes, has the right to eat some grapes.

1 Corinthians 9:7 **Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?**

The shepherd feeds, leads, waters, protects and cares for the flock or herd is entitled to some of the milk or wool.

Paul gives three examples of vocations where the worker is supported in his labors, and so it is for a preacher of the gospel.

In vv. 8-10, Paul points out that the Law of Moses supports his claim by quoting from Deuteronomy 25:4.

1 Corinthians 9:8 Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? ⁹ For it is written in the law of Moses, **Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn.** Doth God take care for oxen? ¹⁰ Or saith he *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.

With this evidence, Paul then asks the question:

1 Corinthians 9:11 If we have sown unto you spiritual things, *is it* a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

Paul is saying that it is proper for those who have benefitted spiritually to return a portion of material support to the one or ones who helped them. Therefore, we offer material support to those who have led us to Christ and labor in the word that we might grow in grace.

The Example of Precedent

1 Corinthians 9:12 **If others be partakers of *this* power over you, *are* not we rather?...**

The Corinthians were supporting other ministers, so Paul asks why he should not also expect the same support, especially since he was the founding apostle of the church. But as soon as he says this, look at what else he says.

1 Corinthians 9:12 If others be partakers of *this* power over you, *are* not we rather? **Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.**

Remember what this chapter is about, really. Paul is using himself as the picture of how we limit our liberty, how we manage our expectations as saints, how we give up our rights as sons, for the good of others because we love them. Paul is teaching us by example that this is how it is done.

Now, if we try to do this in our flesh, we are going to be miserable. We won't want to limit our liberty and if we do, we will complain about it. Complaining is the signal for several things: 1) that we don't love our fellow saints, 2) the doctrine

has not yet worked in us, 3) we are being selfish, 4) we need to engage in the edificational process and be transformed.

Can we stop for a moment and think about what I just said? When you find yourself complaining about...whatever, stop and ask yourself if that is coming from godly love. Stop and consider if there is a doctrine that was working in you, would you feel differently about it? Stop and ask yourself, "Am I taking pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, and in distresses for Christ's sake?" And if we are not, what should we do about it? I think you know the answer to that, but let me just say, is the answer to "stop complaining?" No. The answer is to advance your sonship life so that you don't think about complaining.

And if you don't think you can get there, I am telling you, you are wrong.

When I talk about loving our fellow saints, I am not talking about an emotion, I am talking about making a decision to value and esteem (V&E) them because the Spirit of God who is in us, has taken the doctrine (mainly in Romans 12) and has generated those five core components of godly love in us, and we make a choice to live out of the doctrine. I just have to say, this will not happen magically, but we must engage in and cooperate with this process. I spent three weeks explaining how this is done in our Ephesians study in Sessions 26-29.

Even though Paul is teaching them the truth about giving, it is not so he can receive; it is for their spiritual benefit that he teaches this. Because of the circumstances in the assemblies, Paul has never taken a dime from the Corinthians, but he "suffers all things" so that the work of the gospel is not hindered. It is not the norm, but Paul is making a sonship decision to limit that which he should expect and, by God's ordination, has a right to. And he is doing it so that he does not hinder the spiritual work he is trying to do with them.

Unfortunately, some ministers today use all kinds of schemes as they "beg" for money: using guilt, fear, intimidation, greed, etc. The gospel should be presented and the work of the ministry performed as a "free gift" with no strings attached. From the preacher's point of view, the ministry should be performed "with simplicity!" This makes it all the more important that mature churches support

the ministry and its ministers, so that they might preach the truth “without charge.”

1 Corinthians 9:12 If others be partakers of *this* power over you, *are* not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; **but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.**

In other words, Paul is enduring some things from a group among the Corinthians who doubt his apostleship. Why? Lest the gospel of Christ should be hindered. Do you recognize this principle from other things Paul has written?

1 Corinthians 4:12 And labour, working with our own hands: **being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:**

Romans 12:14 **Bless them which persecute you:** bless, and curse not.

Romans 12:17 **Recompense to no man evil for evil.** Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

Romans 12:21 **Be not overcome of evil,** but overcome evil with good.

Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ² With all lowliness and meekness, **with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;**

³ Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In vs. 13, Paul uses an example of this principle from the Old Testament (OT) priesthood, where the priests received a portion of the sacrifices which were brought to the temple.

1 Corinthians 9:13 Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live *of the things* of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? ¹⁴ Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

Notice that this issue of supporting ministers is what God ordained. This is God’s plan. But also notice that Paul is practicing what he is preaching. He has this

group in the Corinthian church that is dead set against him. They are looking at everything he does so they can discredit him. And what does Paul do?

There are those outside the Corinthian assembly that notice what Paul is doing, how Paul is sacrificing, and how Paul joyfully sets aside his liberty for a group of complaining, carnal, mal-content babies who question his very apostleship. Paul endured things most believers would not put up with.

What is sad about this is that other ministers were trying to bring the Corinthians under the law program, and they didn't question them at all. These ministers mistreated the Corinthians, but they put up with it. But when it came to Paul, they questioned and second-guessed his authority.

2 Corinthians 11:18 Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.

¹⁹ For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye *yourselves* are wise. ²⁰ For ye suffer, if a man **bring you into bondage**, if a man **devour you**, if a man **take of you**, if a man **exalt himself**, if a man **smite you on the face**.

So here is what was happening, instead of evaluating Paul based on his adherence to the scripture, such as the limiting of his rights as their apostle, they evaluated Paul on the basis of these other guys. Paul isn't bringing them into bondage, he is setting them free under grace, but they don't see it. Paul doesn't devour them.

These other guys took money (demanded offerings) from the Corinthians, but Paul doesn't take anything from them.

Paul does not receive any monies from the Corinthians. Not because they shouldn't support him, they should. But he has made a decision not to take any money from them. In fact, there are three situations in which Paul declined to be supported by those he is ministering to.

- 1) Paul does not take any support from the Corinthians as a rebuke against the Corinthians in light of his critics and his enemies who are questioning his motivation. In other words, because of what he is being accused of, by his critics at Corinth, Paul will not take a dime.
- 2) Paul refused to be supported by the Thessalonians when they first became an assembly because they were too young. To make it easier for them to

get their assembly established, he declined for them to support him. Paul determined that when they first organized as a local church, it would be unwise to put an extra financial burden on them.

- 3) Later, after the church was well established, Paul did not take any support from the Thessalonians because there were some in that assembly who thought a minister should not be paid.

There are people today who think that way. But what we learn from Paul is that these three situations are exceptions from the norm. Paul will teach that it is proper to support those who minister and that a church supporting its pastor is a sign of spiritual maturity and doctrinal understanding.

These other guys exalt themselves, but Paul never exalts himself in a way of vainglory. When Paul does talk about his apostolic authority, it is not for the purpose of self-promotion but it is meant for their spiritual benefit.

2 Corinthians 1:24 **Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy:** for by faith ye stand.

These other guys have even physically assaulted them – what kind of ministers can these be? Even with all this, the Corinthians cannot seem to see Paul living the doctrine and cannot see him as the apostle, friend, mentor, and guide that he is.

But let's take this back to the point, that Paul limits his rights, his authority as an apostle, and his liberty for the reason of him, by love, serving the Corinthians.