

1Cor. 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?

1Cor. 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.

I had to read through this section a couple of times to make the transition. The previous chapter was talking about making choices carefully so as not to stumble weaker Christians. Though not obvious at first, that is still the issue in this chapter. Paul is clarifying some of the choices he has made in ministry as being in deference for the good of those to whom he is ministering.

Paul starts this section with some questions that are intended to have an obvious answer to the recipients of this letter—YES, to each question posed in the first verse. In verse 2 he references the evidence of their changed lives as proof that he is teaching the truth as specifically commissioned (from the Greek for *apostleship*) by the Lord to do. The Greek for the word *seal* indicates “a mark of genuineness.”

1Cor. 9:3 Mine answer to them that do examine me is this,

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

1Cor. 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?

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

Along with apostleship came certain rights and privileges. They had the right to expect provision to be made for them and their spouses (if applicable) as they carried out their ministry. This is in accordance with how Peter (Cephas) and the other apostles were treated in their ministries. The wording of verses 3 and 6 makes it sound like there were some who questioned Paul and Barnabas’ right to expect such provision. Ministry for them was full time job in and of itself, but we know from other scripture that Paul continued to ply his trade of tentmaking to pay his own way.

Acts 18:2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

Acts 18:3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Paul also chose not to take a wife. Maybe it was these choices, which differed from the lifestyles of the other apostles, that caused some to question Paul’s apostleship in the first place.

1Cor. 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?

“charges” = rations for a soldier, i.e. (by extension) his stipend or pay:— wages.

Paul utilizes human logic as he makes his argument. Soldiers aren’t expected to go to war without being given the provisions a soldier needs. A man who plants and works a vineyard expects to get to eat from that vineyard. A shepherd who tends the goats expects to get milk for his own use.

I don't think these comparisons were arbitrary choices. Scripture describes the Christian life in those very terms. We are soldiers in the army of Christ, the Lord of hosts, ever at battle with spiritual warfare.

Psa. 84:3 Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, *even* thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.

Eph. 6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Eph. 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.

The Lord described Himself as the Vine, the Father as the Vinedresser and believers as branches of the vine.

John 15:1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye *are* the branches:

He also described Himself as the Good Shepherd and believers as those that make up the flock.

John 10:11 I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

Paul is equating himself to a soldier in authority under the Lord of hosts as he labors to bring men to a saving knowledge of the Lord, to a worker in authority under the Vinedresser, and a shepherd in authority under the Chief Shepherd. In these positions, it is natural and right for him to expect to be provided for through his labors.

1Cor. 9:8 Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?

1Cor. 9:9 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?

1Cor. 9:10 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.

Paul now makes a connection with human reasoning to biblical instruction. He quotes the words recorded by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy.

Deut. 25:4 Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out *the* corn.

Even work animals were expected to receive provision as they worked. They were to be allowed to eat as they worked. Did God give this instruction solely for the benefit of the ox? No. Obviously, the welfare of the ox affects the welfare of the owner. We work because we expect to benefit from that work. (4/11)
Those in ministry have direct impact on the welfare of the church as a whole.

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

1Cor. 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.

These verses indicate that this church had made provision for others who had ministered among them. It would seem that they had not even made that offer to Paul and Barnabas. Paul makes an important distinction in verse 11—spiritual

things are much more valuable than carnal things. Spiritual possessions are eternal; carnal or worldly possessions are temporary. Paul and Barnabas had sown spiritual seed in this church from which they could reap spiritual fruit. A bit of material provision for them was a very little thing in comparison to the spiritual benefits they would reap from the seed they had sown. Paul clarifies that he and Barnabas have not taken advantage of the people in any way. They did not want their motives misunderstood. They were not out to get a life on easy street at the expense of those to whom they ministered. They did not want to be a stumbling block to the gospel of Christ.

I can't help but want to make a comparison with many in the ministry today—but I won't.

1Cor. 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?

1Cor. 9:14 Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

Paul is basically saying that the priests who minister at the temple and offer the sacrifices have their food provided from the sacrifices that are made. In like manner, the Lord has commanded or decreed that those who preach the gospel of Christ should be given physical provision by those to whom they minister. The Lord sent out His disciples upon the same principle.

Matt. 10:9 Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,

Matt. 10:10 Nor scrip for *your* journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

1Cor. 9:15 But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for *it were* better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

Paul has chosen not to take advantage of the privilege that God has granted him on the behalf of his ministry. Why? Precisely because he did not want anyone to misjudge his motives. In fact, he is careful to state that he is not writing this letter to get them to start providing for him. He considers it a privilege to serve God without material benefit.

1Cor. 9:16 For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

Paul seems to be saying that he has no choice but to preach the gospel. It's not a path he chose for himself; it is a path that God chose for him. He fears the consequences of not obeying God. He seems to be saying that since he is just being obedient to God's command, he has no right to be paid for his service.

1Cor. 9:17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.

Paul seems to be saying that had he chosen to go out and preach the gospel, he would expect to receive material support. Because he did not willingly choose to be a minister of the gospel but was singled out by God to do so, he is acting in obedience and would rather not be compensated.

1Cor. 9:18 What is my reward then? *Verily* that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

I like the wording of the NLT for this verse:

What then is my pay? It is the satisfaction I get from preaching the Good News without expense to anyone, never demanding my rights as a preacher.

1Cor. 9:19 For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

I like the wording of the Complete Jewish Bible for this verse:

For although I am a free man, not bound to do anyone's bidding, I have made myself a slave to all in order to win as many people as possible.

What an amazing heart this man has! How many of us today are willing to forego any privilege that is rightfully ours out of deference to the opinions of man or as an act of love and devotion to the God we serve? I dare say, not many. We would use human logic to justify the *need* for taking advantage of that privilege. Paul felt it a privilege to live by faith in God's provision for his every need without having to demand his rightful due from men. That is the kind of faith that I want to dominate my life. It's not that I want to disregard practicality and logical reasoning; I just don't want to live dependent upon man's provision—I want to be totally dependent upon God's provision. I want to have the faith that follows God in faith wherever that may lead without regard to whether human logic would deem that obedience practical or reasonable.

1Cor. 9:20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

1Cor. 9:21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

1Cor. 9:22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some.

I think Paul is saying that he did his best to identify with the people to whom he was ministering in hopes of making their hearts more receptive to his message. When ministering to Jewish people, he lived according to their customs and did not try to cause offense. When ministering to those that were focused on the practice of the law, i.e., the Pharisees, again he tried not to offend by overt disregard of those laws. When ministering to those who were no longer under the law of God but under the law of Christ, he was again careful not to give offense with regard to their freedom in grace. When ministering to those who were weak in faith, he sacrificed his freedom rather than risk offending the weaker brother.

I think it is important to note that Paul is concerned about his testimony before the people to whom he is ministering. With each group mentioned he is stating that he is using his freedom in Christ to choose not to offend. I believe that

choice oftentimes was a sacrificial choice as evidenced in the context of this chapter regarding his choice not to accept any pay for his ministry so as to be careful not to allow anyone to question the motive for his ministry or his message.

1Cor. 9:23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

Paul's focus was on how his testimony would impact how the people received the gospel message from him. He is more concerned about his eternal blessings than his earthly blessings. He had "set his affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:2)

1Cor. 9:24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

Paul now compares the Christian life to a race. There are many that run a race, but only one person comes out the winner. Paul is saying that we should all run the race of life so as to win the prize at the end. The key difference to note is that every true Christian will receive the prize of salvation, but not every Christian will be rewarded according to their service in the same way. The same rewards are available to all, but only those that run to win will receive the best rewards.

I think another observation is necessary at this point. A race is run according to set guidelines or rules—and so is the Christian's race. Those rules are established in the Word of God. The only way to run to win the prize is to make sure you are familiar with all the rules and guidelines. The scripture should be the daily bread for our spirit just as surely as food is for our body. Not only does the scripture give us the rules for winning, it also teaches us how to get rid of unnecessary burdens and avoid the sin that would hinder our performance in the race.

Heb. 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us....

1Cor. 9:25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

Paul is referencing the training of an athlete to make a point. An athlete who wants to be the best at his sport, trains with great self-discipline. He is willing to subject himself to a rigorous training regimen just to win a crown that is corruptible; it has no lasting benefit. The crowns that we can earn as Christians, on the other hand, have benefits that will last for eternity.

1Cor. 9:26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

1Cor. 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Paul is stating his determination to live his life spiritually with the same rigor and self-discipline as a champion athlete. His course is sure and his goal certain. He doesn't want to end up on the losing end of eternal rewards by disregarding

the message he is preaching to others. Again, I liked the wording of the CJB for these verses:

Accordingly, I don't run aimlessly but straight for the finish line; I don't shadow-box but try to make every punch count. I treat my body hard and make it my slave so that, after proclaiming the Good News to others, I myself will not be disqualified.