

## Living as a Servant of God [Slide 1] 1 Corinthians 9:1-18

Did you know that one of the ways to find joy is by giving up your rights? That is one of the things we will learn today in our passage.

[Slide 2] I invite you to turn in your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 1-18. I Corinthians is the seventh book in the New Testament after the four Gospels, Acts and Romans. Paul begins by stating that he has every right to be financially supported. He is an apostle and should have the same rights as the other apostles. Let's read verses 1-6. Read.

I have mentioned in the past and I repeat here that certain people among the Corinthians challenged Paul's authority. Paul defends himself by claiming that he is an apostle and he should have the same rights as the other apostles. He makes his case primarily by using rhetorical questions. The way he asks the questions indicates he expects a positive answer. Am I not free? Yes, you are free. He's talked about Christian freedom in chapter 8. Does he have freedom in Christ? Yes he does.

Is he not an apostle? Has he not seen Jesus? The proof that he qualifies as an apostle is because he has seen Jesus resurrected. When the apostles were deciding on a replacement for Judas in Acts 1 they said in verses 21-22 that the person should be a witness of Jesus and his resurrection. Since Paul saw the resurrected Jesus on the Damascus Road he qualified to be an apostle. That is the point of Paul saying that he had seen Jesus. It established his credentials to be an apostle.

As a side note, this is one of the reasons why I believe the gift of apostleship ended toward the last of the first century, because after that time no one was around who would have seen Jesus resurrected.

Not only has Paul seen Jesus resurrected, but the Corinthians are evidence of his apostolic ministry by their very existence. Their church existed because Paul had obeyed the Lord Jesus' mission to him to go to the Gentiles. They are Paul's work in the Lord and they are his seal of apostleship, verse 2. A seal was placed on a letter or box or some other object to guarantee the validity of the contents. An unbroken seal guaranteed the contents were authentic. Paul says that the Corinthians themselves guarantee the authenticity of Paul's apostleship, probably not just because they existed but probably also because they were so significantly blessed with the more miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit.

So Paul argues in verses 3-6 that he and Barnabas have a right to eat, to drink, and to travel with believing wives like the rest of the apostles. He means not that he has a right to physically eat or drink, but rather that he has a right to be paid so that he can eat and drink. There is no evidence that Paul was ever married. It's possible that Barnabas had a wife or Paul could simply be arguing that if they had wives, they should be able to bring them and also have them supported financially like Peter and James and Jude, the Lord's brothers.

Paul's first argument is pretty simple. I'm an apostle and I should have the same rights as the other apostles to be financially supported.

[Slide 3] Paul's second argument is to appeal to experience and the Law to support his right to financial support. Let's read verses 7-13. Does someone serve as a soldier at his own expense? Of course not. Paul compares ministers of the Gospels to be like soldiers in the Lord's army.

Soldiers are pulled away from their occupation and asked to serve full time carrying out the orders of their commanding officer. It's an appropriate analogy.

Does someone plant a vineyard and not eat of his own fruit? No, he gets to partake of the fruit of the vineyard. Does someone shepherd a flock and not drink from the milk of the flock. In the Middle East shepherds are still paid by getting a share of the milk. Experience teaches us that a person who works at some calling or occupation should reap a material benefit from their service.

Paul teaches that the OT Law also taught this principle in Deut. 25:4 when it says you shall not muzzle the threshing ox. In order to grind wheat into flour, the wheat seeds would be poured between two millstones which were turned by an ox in a yoke attached to a wooden beam that moved the stones as the ox walked in a circle. The owner was not to put a muzzle on the ox so that the ox could eat while it was threshing.

[Slide 4] At the end of verse 9 it says, "God is not concerned about oxen, is he?" This is probably a unique figure of speech called a litotes where the writer uses the negative to emphasize the opposite. The point is that God is so concerned even for lowly oxen that he made a special law to make sure that even they enjoyed the fruit of their labor.

[Slide 5] The point Paul is making is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If God is so concerned even for dumb oxen that he creates a special law so that they enjoy the fruit of their labor, how much more God will be concerned that his servants enjoy the fruit of their labor. Paul concludes that argument in verses 10-11. Read.

[Slide 6] Spiritual things are more important than physical things. If someone has taught you God's truth, or shared with you something about God, or encouraged in the Faith, or trained you to minister, or prayed for you, those things are more valuable than material things. You should be willing to support those spiritual activities with money which is less valuable.

[Slide 7] Then for the first time in verse 12 Paul indicates that he is not going to make use of his right to be financially supported. Paul says that he will not take advantage of his right so that he will not cause any hindrance to the gospel. Paul was a self-supporting missionary. He made tents in order to earn enough money to live on.

People get wary and suspicious about giving away their money. Surely charlatans and scam artists exist. I saw a TV report showing Jesse Duplantis saying that God told him to raise 54 million dollars to purchase his fourth private jet. I think about how many native missionaries you could support and for how long on 54 million and I think the cause of the Gospel would be better served if Jesse stayed home without the new jet and supported missionaries all around the globe who would plant churches and live with the people instead of him hopping on a jet, doing some large speaking events and then flying home to a 35,000 square foot mansion.

Unbelievers hear stuff like that and think that preachers are hucksters and that the Gospel is nothing more than a get rich scheme to sucker people out of their money. Paul had a right to be supported but he chose not to exercise that right so that people would not be hindered in coming to Christ.

In our offering we routinely tell our guests not to feel obligated to give to the offering. We do that so they won't think that all we're interested in is their money. What we really want is for them to know God and his Son Jesus. That's the most important thing. If you point people to Jesus and lift him up and honor him, then God will take care of the finances. That has been our experience. We keep you up to date with our financial situation in the bulletin and we trust God to provide.

[Slide 8] The OT Law also made provision for the priests and Levites who ministered in the Temple. Paul refers to those practices in verse 13. The priests and Levites were able to eat portions of the meat and grain sacrifices, the showbread once its time in the Temple was done, and they were financially supported by money offerings. God set all this up in the Law to provide for the material support of the priests and Levites.

[Slide 9] Finally, Jesus himself taught that those who minister the Gospel ought to be supported financially. In his instructions to the seventy disciples when he sent them out on a preaching mission Jesus said in Luke 10:7, Read. In Matthew 10:9-10 Jesus told the twelve disciples when he sent them out the following: “Read.” When you are in full-time work for the Lord, you should receive compensation.

All of this information may not be of great interest to most of you since you are not in full time ministry, although it is of great interest to me. The application is pretty straightforward: You should financially support those who devote their lives and time to the ministry of the Gospel.

I want to read to you something about the condition of many pastors here in the United States. I do not read this because it applies to you and me. I read it as a way of complimenting you. You’ll see what I mean. Read p. 31. The only description in here that describes me is the one where it says 100% of pastors have had a friend from seminary who left the ministry because of burnout, conflict in their church, or moral failure. That describes most of my closest friends from Seminary days.

Many pastors are not supported well by their churches either in terms of money or in terms of working well with the pastor and supporting his leadership. That is not true of this church. You have been gracious to my family, adequately compensated me, encouraged my wife and children, and supported me in my efforts to lead. So pat yourself on the back.

I don’t know if any of the future pastor candidates are going to call me and ask me what my experience at this church has been, but if they do, I will tell them this is a great place for them and their family. This church will not pressure his wife or children to be something they’re not. They will grow up nurtured by this church family. He will have opportunities to try things. He’s not going to have to deal with a bunch of mean-spirited cranky people. If he will love them and stay true to the Bible they will help him with whatever he attempts.

[Slide 10] In verses 15-18 Paul says he chose to support himself so that he could offer the Gospel without charge. Let’s read those verses. Read.

Paul has not claimed his rights and he is not writing now to try to get financial support. In fact, he is somewhat boasting in the fact that he has not had to rely on the Corinthians for financial support and he would rather die than have to take support and possibly erect a barrier to the Gospel for some people.

In verse 16 Paul refers to the Divine call on his life. He is under compulsion from God to preach the Gospel and since that is the case, he can’t personally boast in his proclaiming the Gospel itself. In fact woe is upon him if he does not preach the Gospel.

If Paul voluntarily serves God, then God will reward him, but if God has to force him to do what God has called him to do or if he doesn’t do anything, there is no reward. This is all because Paul is a steward of the Gospel. God has appointed him to preach good news.

Given that Paul is a steward of the Gospel, he is obligated to proclaim it, but Paul is not obligated to proclaim it and have to also work to support himself. That is not part of God’s call. That is the one thing Paul could do freely for God and for the mission that he was not required to do. That is how he could earn a reward. Think about the military analogy Paul used earlier of

being a soldier. When your commanding officer tells you to guard the ammunition dump or walk five miles to the next bivouac or transport the General to headquarters, you don't get a reward for obeying orders. That's what you're supposed to do. They pin a medal on you, they reward you when you go above and beyond the call of duty. That is what Paul has done. Although affirming his apostolic authority and right to material support, he has foregone that right and gone beyond the call of duty so that he can offer the gospel without charge to anyone that he might receive a reward.

What do you and I gain from Paul's example? I think much.

[Slide 11] First, you and I are under compulsion to proclaim the Gospel. We may not have a specific calling announced by a personal visit from the Lord Jesus himself, but you and I have been called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ. If we are to make disciples of all nations that necessarily requires you and me to proclaim the Gospel, often. I know I need to constantly be reminded that I have been called to be an ambassador of Jesus. God has called me and you to proclaim his good news. We are under obligation to share the Gospel as much as Paul was. Do you feel your obligation?

[Slide 12] There is a second spiritual principle illustrated by Paul about how we transform feelings of duty and obligation into joy. I call it the "second mile" principle based on what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount when he told the Jews that if a Roman soldier commanded them to carry his pack for a mile, they should carry it a second mile. Whenever you have to do something for someone because they have commanded or told you to do it, it is very hard to feel joyful in that situation. You're being forced to do something you may not want to do. That is true in our human relationships but it can even be true in our relationship with God. The way to transform feelings of compulsion or drudgery or obligation into feelings of joy is to go beyond what was asked so that you are choosing to do the action as a way of showing kindness or whatever.

Paul had to proclaim the Gospel. He chose to do it and to support himself while doing it. I encourage you to try this principle. Say your mother asks you to wash the dishes. You not only wash the dishes but you also mop the kitchen floor. Notice then what your attitude is. Your boss asks you to open up the business for her. You do that and you have coffee ready for her when she arrives. Your aging parent asks you to take her grocery shopping and you not only do that and put away the groceries but you also mow the lawn while you are there. If you are really irked by someone asking you to do something, try going the second mile and see if you experience joy instead of obligation.

[Slide 13] The third thing we can learn from Paul was his passion never to put a hindrance to the Gospel in front of people. Is it important to you not to hinder people coming to Christ? You need to do is make sure that your life matches what you proclaim, that you are not living a life of hypocrisy before unchurched people. Don't get caught up on secondary issues so that you can't love people. You need to learn to overlook people's habits and behaviors, their clothing and body ornamentation, and their idiosyncrasies and what comes out of their mouth and treat them kindly and respectfully. It is not your job to clean them up. It is your job to point them to the one who can help clean them up. We want to make sure that we don't confuse them about what the Gospel is. We are not calling them to change their lives and be better people. We are calling them to admit their sin and to call upon Jesus to save them and to believe that he is God the Son who died on the cross to deliver them and was raised from the dead.

Rather than claiming our rights, let's see how we can become "second mile" Christians. Pray.