

# LESSONS ON PAUL'S RIGHT AND OBLIGATION

*1 Corinthians 9:1-18*

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## **He Defended His Right to Receive Support (1 Cor. 9:1-14)**

In this first half of the chapter, Paul proved that he had the right to receive financial support from the church at Corinth. He gave five arguments to support this contention.

**1. HIS APOSTLESHIP (VV. 1-6).** The word *apostle* means "one sent under commission," and refers primarily to the 12 Apostles and Paul. These men had a special commission, along with the New Testament prophets, to lay the foundation of the church (**Eph 2:20**). One of the qualifications for being an apostle was a personal experience of seeing the resurrected Christ (**Acts 1:21-22**).

Paul saw the Lord when he was traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians (**Acts 9:1-9**). The Apostles were to be witnesses of Christ's resurrection (**Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-43**).

The Apostles also were given the ability to perform special signs and wonders to attest the message that they preached (**Heb. 2:4**).

Paul had performed such miracles during his ministry in Corinth (**2 Cor. 12:12**). In fact, Paul considered the Corinthian church a very special "sear" of his ministry as an apostle. Corinth was a difficult city to minister to and yet Paul accomplished a great work because of the Lord's enablement (see **Acts 18:1-17**).

Therefore, as an apostle, Paul had the right to receive support from the people to whom he ministered. (The word *power* is used six times in this chapter, and means "authority, right.") The apostle was the representative of Christ; he deserved to be welcomed and cared for. Paul was unmarried; but if he'd had a wife, she too would have had the right to be supported by the church.

Peter was a married man (**Mark 1:30**), and his wife traveled with him. Paul had the same right, but he did not use it.

Paul also had the right to devote his full time to the ministry of the Word. He did not have to make tents. The other Apostles did not work to support themselves because they gave themselves completely to the ministry of the Word.

However, both Paul and Barnabas laboured with their own hands to support not only themselves, but also the men who laboured with them.

**2. HUMAN EXPERIENCE (V. 7).** Everyday experience teaches us that a workman deserves some reward for his labors. If a man is drafted to be a soldier, the government pays his wages and provides a certain amount of supplies for him. The man who plants a vineyard gets to eat the fruit, just as the shepherd or herdsman has the right to use the milk from the animals.

- Perhaps in the "*back of his mind*," Paul was comparing.
- The church to an army, a vineyard, and a flock. As an apostle, Paul was in the very front line of the battle. He had already compared the church at Corinth to a cultivated field (**1 Cor 3:6-9**), and the Lord Himself had used the image of the vine and branches (**John 15**) as well as the flock (**John 10**). The lesson was clear. The Christian worker has the right to expect benefits for his labors.
- If this is true in the "secular" realm, it is also true in the spiritual realm.
- ***The Old Testament Law (vv. 8-12)***. The Old Testament was the "Bible" of the early church, since the New Testament was in the process of being written. The first believers, found guidance in the spiritual principles of the Law, even though they had been liberated from obeying the commandments of the Law.
- Paul quoted **Deut 25:4** to prove his point. (He quoted this same verse when he wrote to, Timothy and encouraged the church to pay their ministers adequately, **1 Tim 5:17-18**.) Since oxen cannot read, this verse was not written for them. Nor was it written only for the fanner who was using the labors of the ox.
- It would be cruel for the fanner to bind the mouth of the ox and prevent him from eating the available gain. After all, the ox was doing the work.
- Paul correctly saw a spiritual principle in this commandment: The laborer has the right to share in the bounties.
- The ox had plowed the soil in preparation for sowing, and now he was treading out the gain that had been harvested. Paul had plowed the soil in Corinth.
- He had seen a harvest from the seed he had planted. It was only right that he enjoyed some of the fruits of that harvest.

- **First Corinthians 9:11 enunciates** a basic principle of the Christian life: If we receive spiritual blessings, we should in turn share material blessings. For example, the Jews gave spiritual blessings to the Gentiles; so, the Gentiles had an obligation to share materially with the Jews (**Rom 15:25-27**).
- Those who teach us the Word have the right to expect us to support them (**Gal 6:6-10**).
- We have reason to believe that Paul did accept financial support from other churches. The Philippian believers sent him two gifts when he went to Thessalonica (**Phil 4:15-16**). I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service, Paul reminded the Corinthians (**2 Cor 11:8**).
- Apparently other ministers had accepted support at Corinth (**1 Cor 9:12**), - but Paul preferred to remain independent "lest we should hinder the Gospel of Christ." He wanted to be the best example possible to other believers (**2 Thess 3:6-9**).
- ***Old Testament practice (v. 13)***. The priests and Levites lived off of the sacrifices and offerings that were brought to the temple.
- The regulations governing their part of the offerings, and the special tithes they received also are found in **Num 18:8-32; Lev 6:14-7:36; and 27:6-33**. The application is clear. If the Old Testament ministers under Law were supported by the people to whom they ministered, should not God's servants who minister under grace also be supported?

**3. THE TEACHING OF JESUS (v. 14)**. Paul was no doubt referring to our Lord's words recorded in **Luke 10:7-8** and **Matt 10:10**. The Corinthians did not have a copy of either Gospel to refer to, but the Lord's teaching would have been given to them as a part of the oral tradition shared by the Apostles.

*The laborer is worthy of his hire* is a fundamental principle that the church dare not neglect.

Paul certainly proved his point. His five arguments proved conclusively that he had the right to expect the Corinthian believers to support him in his ministry when he was with them. Yet he had deliberately refused their support. Why? This he explained in the second part of his defense.

**He Defended His Right to Refuse Support (1 Cor. 9:15-27)**

Paul had the authority (right) to receive material support, but being a mature Christian, he balanced his authority with discipline. He did not have the right to give up his liberty in Christ but he did have the liberty to give up his rights.

Now we understand why he wrote as he did: he gave the Corinthian believers a living example of the very principles he was writing about Should not the stronger believers in the church be able to set aside their rights for the sake of the weaker saints? Was eating meat more important than edifying the church?

Paul was talking about priorities, the flings that are really important to us in our lives. It is unfortunate that some Christians have their personal priorities confused and, as a result, are hindering the work of Christ If each believer were practicing Matt 6:33, there would be plenty of money for missions, plenty of manpower for service, and the work of the Lord would prosper. But not every Christian is practicing Matt 6:33.

Paul gave three reasons that explained why he had refused support from the Corinthian church.

**4. FOR THE GOSPEL'S SAKE (VV. 15-18).** Paul did not want to "hinder the Gospel of Christ" (1 Cor 9:12). In that day, the Greek cities were filled with all kinds of itinerant teachers and preachers, most of whom were out to make money. Not only had Paul refused to use the kind of oratory and arguments that these teachers used (1 Cor 2:1-5), but he also refused to accept money from those to whom he ministered. He wanted the message of the Gospel to be free from any obstacles or hindrances in the minds of lost sinners.

- For that matter, when Paul added "neither have I written these flings" (1 Cor 9:15), he was making sure that his readers did not get the idea that he was "hinting" that they should support him!
- Paul could not claim any credit for preaching the Gospel, because he had been called of God to preach. "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16) God had given him a divine stewardship ('dispensation'), and "it is required in, stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor 4:2). God would see to it that Paul would receive his wages (reward - same word translated "hire" in Luke 10:7). What was Paul's reward? The joy of preaching the Gospel without charge! This meant that no man could accuse him of underhanded motives or methods as he shared the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- It is unfortunate when the ministry of the Gospel is sometimes hindered by an overemphasis on money. The unsaved world is convinced that most preachers

and missionaries are only involved in "religious rackets" to take money from innocent people

- No doubt there are religious "racketeers" in the world today (1 Tim 6:3-16), people who "use" religion to exploit others and control them. We would certainly not agree with their purposes or their practices. We must make sure that nothing we do in our own ministry gives the impression that we are of their number.
- A wrong attitude toward money has hindered the Gospel from the earliest days of the church. Ananias and Sapphira loved money more than they loved the truth, and God killed them (Acts 5). Simon the magician thought he could buy the gift of the Spirit with money (Acts 8:18-24). His name is now in the dictionary. Simony is the practice of buying and selling religious offices and privileges.

**5. FOR THE SINNERS' SAKE (VV. 19-23).** What a paradox: free from all men, yet the servant of all men! "Ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:5). Because he was free, Paul was able to serve others and to set aside his own rights for their sake.

- It is unfortunate that the phrase "all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22) has been used and abused by the world and made to mean what Paul did not intend for it to mean. Paul was not a chameleon who changed his message and methods with each new situation. Nor was Paul a compromiser who adjusted his message to please his audience. He was an ambassador, not a politician!
- Paul was a Jew who had a great burden for his own people (Rom 9:1-3; 10:1). But his special calling was to minister to the Gentiles (Eph 3:8). Whenever he went into a new city (and he always went where the Gospel had not yet been preached (Rom 15:20), he headed straight for the synagogue, if there was one, and boldly shared the Gospel. If he was rejected by the Jews, then he turned to the Gentiles. What separated Jews and Gentiles in that day? The Law and the covenants (Eph 2:11-15). In his personal life, Paul so lived that he did not offend either the Jews or the Gentiles. He did not parade his liberty before the Jews, nor did he impose the Law on the Gentiles.
- Was Paul behaving in an inconsistent manner? Of course, not He simply adapted his approach to different groups. When you read his sermons in the Book of Acts, you see this wise adaptation. When he preached to Jews, he started with the Old Testament patriarchs; but when he preached to Gentiles, he began with the God of Creation. Paul did not have a "stock sermon" for all occasions.

- It is worth noting that our Lord followed the same approach. To the highborn Jew, Nicodemus, He talked about spiritual birth ([John 3](#)); but to the Samaritan woman, He spoke about living water ([John 4](#)). Jesus was flexible and adaptable, and Paul followed His example.

## CONCLUSION

- Neither Jesus nor Paul had an inflexible "evangelistic formula" that was used in every situation. It takes tact to have contact. When the people I witness to tell me about their experience of confirmation, I tell them that I too was confirmed. I express my appreciation for the Teachers who taught me and prayed for me. Then I tell them, "A year after My conversion and began to preach, I say to myself, A good witness tries to build bridges, not walls."