

## 1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-14

### INTRODUCTION

Last time we looked at chapter 8 and we discovered that Paul set some limits of Christian freedom, limits that were determined by Christian love. The principle is summarised in 8:9, our freedom ends when another person is offended. In chapter 9 Paul illustrates how he applied this principle in his own life, he didn't just preach it he lived it.

In verses 1-18 Paul discusses the right to be financially supported by those to whom he ministers. Verses 1-14 set out his right to be supported and verses 15-18 gives the reason why he would not take advantage of his right. Then in verses 19-27 he explains that he would give up any and every right for the sake of winning people to Jesus Christ.

But we only have time to look at the first section in which Paul gives his reasons why he had the right to be supported by the churches to which he ministered.

#### 1. PAUL WAS AN APOSTLE (vs. 1-6)

The first verse consists of four questions all of them are rhetorical, the answer to each one is assumed. Paul's first question is "am I not free." It seems that in their letter to Paul (7:1) the Corinthians made much of their Christian freedom and perhaps that freedom was being used to withhold support from Paul. But Paul's main point is that although he also enjoys Christian freedom he chooses not to exercise it especially in his demand to be supported by the Corinthians.

He chose not to exercise his right in receiving support from the church and in doing so he is showing by example that it is not always wise to exercise your Christian freedom.

His second question is "am I not an apostle? As an Apostle he had rights to expect support from the churches he ministered too but it seems that one reason people did not want to support Paul was that they doubted his apostleship. Paul was not among the original disciples who were with Jesus during his earthly ministry and therefore for at least some in Corinth this gave them a reason to question Paul's apostleship.

But Paul defends his apostleship with another couple of questions (v 1). He had seen the risen Lord and that was one of the qualifications for being an apostle (Acts 1:21-22). Paul had seen the risen Lord on at his conversion (Acts 9:4-5) so Paul could clearly say he met the qualification because he had seen the resurrected Christ. Another reason why he could call himself an apostle and expect the support of the church at Corinth is that the church at Corinth was one of the fruits of Paul's apostolic labours.

Their saving faith and their knowledge of God's word came from Paul's faithful evangelism and disciplining (v 2 cf. Acts 18:1-11). The Corinthian church was the seal of Paul's apostleship. In Paul's time seals were used on containers of merchandise and on letters to indicate the authenticity of what was inside and to prevent the contents from being substituted or altered.

The seal was the official representation of the authority of the one who sent it. What was under the seal was guaranteed to be genuine. The church at Corinth was a living seal of Paul's apostleship; they were proof of his genuineness.

Paul continues to defend himself against those who doubted his apostleship against those who sit in judgement on him. The word translated "judgement" is a legal term used for an investigation made before a decision was reached in a legal court case. Paul sees himself in the dock and he is

giving his own defence as to why he is a true apostle and therefore entitled to the church's support.

Does Paul and the other apostles not have a right to at least expect food and drink to be provided for him (v 4)? Do they not have a right to take their wives along with them and expect provision for both of them on their missionary journeys (v 5)?

Indeed the other apostles did this as did the Lord's brothers (sons born naturally to Mary and Joseph after Jesus birth) and Peter. Is it not within the apostles' rights to expect churches to provide for their families? Should only Paul and Barnabas work with their hands while the churches support all the other apostles (v 6)? Paul's point in this opening section, however, is to stress his principle in 8:9.

He could have demanded as an apostle financial support and he could have married and demanded that the church supports his wife as well. But because of his love he chooses to limit his Christian freedom (vs. 12-13) so that he would not be a burden to the church.

But in case the church thinks that Paul's practise of earning a living while preaching the gospel is normal he goes on to give his second reason why it is normal to expect financial support while working in gospel work.

## 2. IT IS A JUST EXPECTATION (v 7)

Paul gives three illustrations to show that paying workers is a just expectation. Paul again uses rhetorical questions, the answers to which are obvious. Soldiers do not fight during the day and then work at a civilian job at night in order to provide for oneself. Soldiers do not serve their country at their own expense. They are provided for and so are their families.

Likewise farmers do not plant a vineyard or cultivate a crop for someone without being paid. Farmers do not farm for free and then do other work in order to provide for themselves. No! A farmer eats the fruit of their farming, either by being paid or by sharing in the fruit of the harvest.

Likewise Shepherds do not work for free they expect at least some of the milk of the flock in payment. The point is that all three types of worker are paid for their labours. It is a rightful expectation for workers to receive their wages or salary at the end of each week or month. We would all be shocked if when pay-day came there was nothing in our account. We would be outraged if we were expected to work for free and then earn our living doing something else.

Well that is Paul's point. That same expectation is true of Christian workers like Apostles. If someone is giving their time fully in the work of the Lord serving the church and serving Christ in the church then it is a right expectation for that person to receive a salary at the end of the month. The church should not expect Pastors and Christian workers to work and not receive remuneration.

It was Paul's right and it is every full time Christian worker's right and expectation. This is an important principle that we all need to agree with. For if we really believe in this principle then it will affect our giving to the church for once we believe that we are responsible for providing financial remuneration for Pastors it will make us consider our giving.

We will give in the knowledge that our giving is helping to keep a Minister of the gospel in gospel work. We should never begrudge giving so that some people can work full time in the work of the Lord in his church. We also ought to give generously so that Pastors are able to give their all in the work without having serious financial concerns about themselves or their families.

### 3. IT IS APPROVED IN GOD'S LAW (vs. 8-11)

The principle of workers being paid for their work is not merely a human point of view for God's law teaches this truth. The quotation about the Ox comes from Deuteronomy 25:4 and it refers to the general practice that oxen were allowed to eat as they worked, eating was their payment. Now is God more concerned for oxen than people?

If God is concerned that oxen should receive payment for their labours then how much more is God concerned that people should be paid for their labours? So the primary purpose of this Old Testament quotation is to underline the truth that workers should be paid for their labours. That Old Testament verse was written for us says Paul (v 10); it establishes the clear point that people should earn their living from their labours.

The man who ploughs and the one who threshers do so in the hope of sharing in the crops come harvest time (v 10). Paul then applies the general principle to spiritual things (v 11). If someone sows spiritual seed then should he not reap a material harvest (v 11)? But notice who it is that is responsible for providing the material harvest? It is the church in which the worker works. So every Pastor and Christian worker has the right to receive payment from the church or churches where they work. People who receive the ministry from a faithful Pastor have a duty and responsibility to provide materially for that Pastor.

The Pastor is involved in spiritual work but he ought to receive material rewards. Of course he does receive spiritual rewards but the church's responsibility is to provide for the material welfare of their Pastor. Now this is not easy to preach but I must preach it for the bible is clear that Christian Ministers and workers ought to be supported by those who receive their ministry.

That is our duty and responsibility and therefore when giving of our money to the Lord and to his church this important aspect must be considered.

It is sad when a faithful Pastor has to work in secular employment in order to support his ministry. Sometimes it is necessary because of the size of the church but perhaps if all churches really believed in the principles laid down here then we could all do more to make sure that Pastors are able to give their time fully in the Lord's work. We could do this by helping to support financially churches that cannot afford to keep a pastor.

That is what happens here in our church. I look forward to the day when as a church we are self supporting and are able to help other churches support their Pastor so that they can give their time and attention full time to the work that the Lord has called them to.

In the recent history of the church there has been a tendency to keep their Pastors poor while the rest of the congregation is comparably rich. This ought not to be; we ought under God to seek to support those in full time ministry well so that they do not have any great financial concerns.

I know that this is hard because many of our churches are small but we ought to pray that God will enable his servants to receive a fair remuneration so that they can give all their time to the work that they have been called to do. God is generous to us we ought to reflect that generosity in our giving to God and to His work.

### 4. IT WAS AFFORDED TO OTHERS (v 12)

Paul's fourth reason why he has a right to receive support from the Corinthian church is that they afforded financial support to others. The church at Corinth apparently had always supported their workers; they no doubt supported Apollos and Peter (1:12 & 3:22). As Paul was the one used by

God to establish the church and as he was its first teacher helping to build up the church in the things of God then surely he had more right to support than others.

However Paul chose not to insist on his right to support in spite of the many reasons he had to justify his right to be supported, he waived that right. He was willing to endure all things including financial hardships and difficulties in order that the gospel might not be hindered. The word translated "put up with" (stego) means "to bear or pass over in silence."

Paul used the present tense in order to show that throughout his entire ministry he continued to bear uncomplainingly whatever was necessary including financial difficulties in order to fulfil his commission of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul demonstrated that this is no idle word for he worked as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3) to pay for his way while he preached and taught in Corinth. For Paul paying his own way was one way of assuring that the gospel was not hindered. Paul did not want new converts or unbelievers to have any reason for thinking that Paul was in it for the money. That he only preached the gospel for selfish motives.

Now the principle applies in our day and generation. Although Ministers of the gospel have a right to receive their living from those they minister too, no Pastor should give the impression that they are in it for the money. This means that we who Pastor must not complain about our salaries, we must be prepared to put up with financial hardship if necessary in order to preach the gospel.

We must never live in an extravagant way so that unbelievers get the impression that we are only in the ministry for the money. We ought to work hard so that no one gets the impression that we have an easy life. We must not allow anything to hinder the preaching of the gospel and we must be prepared to put up with anything in order that we might preach the gospel.

However that does not mean that churches can neglect their Pastors because he is willing to put up with anything for the sake of the gospel without complaining. The key word is balance. Churches must support their Pastors and Pastors must not give the impression by their speech or lifestyle that they are only preaching the gospel for financial rewards.

## 5. IT IS A UNIVERSAL PATTERN (v 13-14)

Paul's fifth reason why he and others are entitled to support from the church is that it is a universal pattern established since the founding of the Priesthood in the Old Testament. The priests who worked and served in the temple were supported by the offerings brought to the temple. (Numbers 18: 8-24). That pattern established in the Old Testament was to be implemented in the church.

We know this because the Lord Jesus commanded that those who preached the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (v 14). Paul is clearly thinking of Luke 10:7 where the Lord states that the worker deserves his wages and in the context he is talking about the gospel worker.

Therefore it is a principle of both the Old Testament and the New Testament that those who are set aside to be involved in God's work should receive their living from those that they minister too. Paul had every right to expect support from the church at Corinth but Paul chose not to receive it, even if it was offered. Instead he chose to limit his freedom in order that the gospel may not be hindered in any way. So Paul's life was an example of the principle stated in chapter 8. He loved people so much that he was not willing to do anything that would hinder them from hearing and receiving the gospel.

Even if that means he had to work as a tentmaker in order to support his gospel work. Paul's choice did not lessen the responsibility of the church at Corinth. He could have demanded support

from them. They were obligated to support Paul but his motive for tent making was gospel preaching, his motive was love for people and if his refusal to take support helped rather than hindered the gospel then his hardships were all worthwhile.

I think in conclusion if all our motives were as pure as Paul's, then this thorny issue of financial support for gospel workers would not be so thorny. If we love people as Paul did and if we desire the gospel to be preached unhindered then we will want to support gospel workers and Pastors in order that they can give themselves fully to the work of gospel preaching.

If Pastors and Gospel Workers loved people and had the same desire as Paul to preach the gospel without hindrance then we will be willing to put up with many a hardship including financial ones in order that the gospel may go unhindered.

May God give us such pure motives so that his work may go forth and so that his gospel will be revealed to many that are still outside of Christ? Finally may God give us pure motives so that God's church may be taught and built up and glory brought to the name of our God?

Amen