

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

1 Corinthians 9:1-27

- “Setting aside personal rights and preferences meant nothing to [Paul] if it meant Christ could use him to save just one more person.” – Dr. Daniel Akin

PAUL WAS INDEED AN APOSTLE AND AS SUCH HIS WORDS ARE AUTHORITATIVE AS INSPIRED BY GOD

- “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you, because you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 9:1-2)
- Paul’s apostleship was being questioned by those who were driven by their own agenda.
- Like other writers in the Bible, Paul’s words are God-inspired and to be received as authoritative.

MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL CAN AND SHOULD RECEIVE PROPER COMPENSATION FOR THEIR LABOR

- “My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Don’t we have the right to eat and drink? 5 Don’t we have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife like the other apostles, the Lord’s brothers, and Cephas? 6 Or do only Barnabas and I have no right to refrain from working? 7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Or who shepherds a flock and does not drink the milk from the flock?

8 Am I saying this from a human perspective? Doesn’t the law also say the same thing? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, *Do not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain*. Is God really concerned about oxen? 10 Isn’t he really saying it for our sake? Yes, this is written for our sake, because he who plows ought to plow in hope, and he who threshes should thresh in hope of sharing the crop. 11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it too much if we reap material benefits from you? 12 If others have this right to receive benefits from you, don’t we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right; instead,

we endure everything so that we will not hinder the gospel of Christ.

13 Don’t you know that those who perform the temple services eat the food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the offerings of the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:3-14)

- Paul went to great lengths to affirm to the Corinthian church that ministers of the Gospel should be compensated properly, but they can waive that right.
- “The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says: *Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain*, and, ‘The worker is worthy of his wages.’” (1 Timothy 5:17-18)
- Paul’s focus on reaching people for Christ was at the forefront of every decision he made.

THE GOSPEL IS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN

- “For my part I have used none of these rights, nor have I written these things that they may be applied in my case. For it would be better for me to die than for anyone to deprive me of my boast! 16 For if I preach the gospel, I have no reason to boast, because I am compelled to preach—and woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward, but if unwillingly, I am entrusted with a commission. 18 What then is my reward? To preach the gospel and offer it free of charge and not make full use of my rights in the gospel.

19 Although I am free from all and not anyone’s slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—to win those under the law. 21 To those who are without the law, like one without the law—though I am not without God’s law but under the law of Christ—to win those without the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means

save some. 23 Now I do all this because of the gospel, so that I may share in the blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:15-23)

- **Paul waived his right to ministerial compensation because he didn't want people taking credit for what the Lord was doing through Paul's ministry.**
- **The gospel should be so important to us that we are willing to make whatever adjustments are necessary to reach more people for Christ.**

WE DO WELL TO STAY COMMITTED TO GOD'S KINGDOM WORK WITH OUR FOCUS ON ETERNITY

- *"Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize. 25 Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown. 26 So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. 27 Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified." (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)*
- **It can be easy to get distracted, and even disqualify ourselves in ministry, if we aren't committed to living fully for Jesus and keeping our focus on our eternal rewards.**
- **No matter how difficult this life becomes, or how much you sacrifice for the advancement of the gospel, it is all worth it and the reward is unimaginable.**

CONNECT GROUP DISCUSSION

Observation:

- What rights does Paul claim in verses 1-6, and how does he defend them?
- According to verses 7-14, what examples and Scriptures does Paul use to show that gospel workers deserve support?
- In verses 15-23, what reasons does Paul give for willingly giving up his rights?
- What images does Paul use in verses 24-27 to describe the Christian life, and what do those images emphasize?

Understanding:

- What is the difference between giving up rights for the gospel and being taken advantage of?
- What does it look like today to become "all things to all people." without compromising truth?
- What personal freedoms or preferences are hardest for you to surrender in the name of the gospel?
- Why is self-discipline essential for spiritual effectiveness, according to Paul?
- How does focusing on an eternal reward change the way we approach daily decisions and habits?
- In what ways can comfort or personal preference compete with gospel impact in our lives?

Loving Outward:

- Who do you need to share the gospel with this week?
- Who do you need to follow-up with regarding the gospel?
- Who are you bringing to church next Sunday?

Connect Group Discussion on Back