

# CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY JULY 28, 2024  
1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-19

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## PAUL TEACHES ON PAYING CHURCH WORKERS

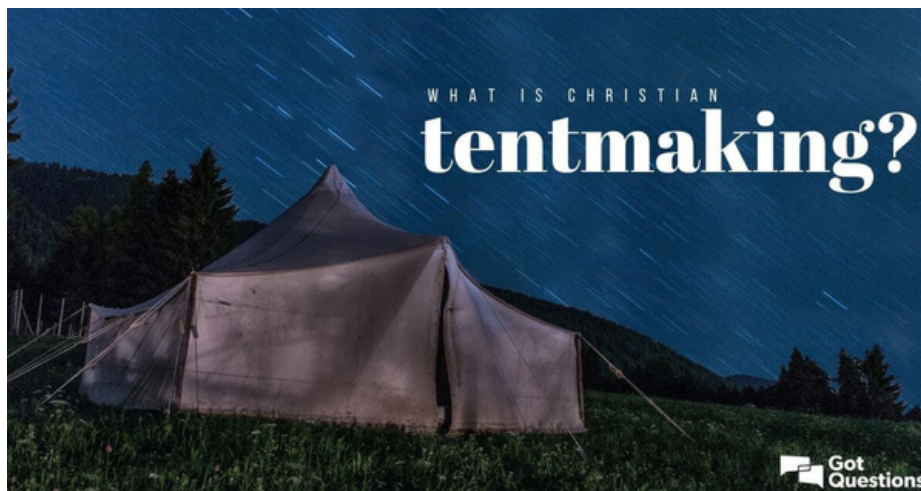
A MIT linguistics professor was lecturing his class and he said this: "In English, a double negative forms a positive. However, in some languages, a double negative remains a negative. But there is not a single language, not one," he said, "in which a double positive expresses a negative." A voice from the back of the room cried out, "Yeah, right."



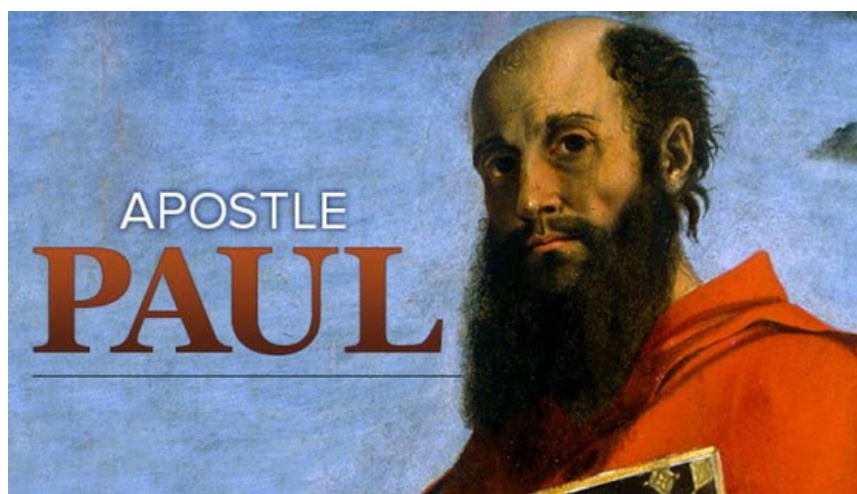
Similarly, when Paul sent his letters to the Corinthian Church, he opened his letter by saying, "Paul, an apostle of Christ." Some in the Corinthian Church would say, "Yeah, right. You, an apostle? No way." And we pick up with that thought in chapter 9 this morning. **Chapter 9, verse 1**, Paul speaking: "Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn't it because of my work that you belong to the Lord? Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you. You yourselves are proof that I am the Lord's apostle."



Now, in our verses today, Paul actually continues the theme that he has been carrying through in the last three chapters. This concerns three particular issues where he claims liberty—he has liberty to partake in something, and yet he refuses to take part because of his dedication to the ministry. His reasons for not exercising the liberty are, one, his love for others, and two, his devotion to the ministry. Here are the three issues where he has liberty but doesn't claim it: in chapter 7, marriage; in chapter 8, refraining from food or drink that could cause others to stumble; and third, today, Paul choosing to be a tentmaker, refusing to be paid by the church and instead covering his own expenses by working a secular job.



So, let's dig in. **Verse 1:** He says, "Am I not an apostle?" Fifteen translations I looked up, each one with the exact same words, "Am I not an apostle?" You know, when I read these words in Paul's letters, which express the same kind of idea in several places, I am so sad. I read them here, and again in chapter 15, and then even in his second letter to the Corinthian Church. He defends his right to be called an apostle. Why does he have to do this? Because there were obviously leaders in the Corinthian Church who were trying to undermine Paul's authority so that they could be seen as preeminent teachers—envy. And so Paul goes on to give his credentials, which validate him as an apostle.



**Verse 1:** "Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes?" Haven't I seen him with my own eyes? Now here, it's pretty clear that Paul is referring to the requirements that the apostles laid out in order to be considered an apostle. Back in chapter one, the setting is the upper room. Peter takes charge as usual and says this, **Acts chapter 1, verse 21:** "So now we," Peter speaking to the 120 in the upper room, "must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus, from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus's resurrection." They nominated two men, prayed, and then in verse 26, we read this: "Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven."

# QUALIFICATIONS OF AN APOSTLE

Witness of the resurrected Christ  
(1 Corinthians 9:1)

Explicitly chosen by Jesus Christ  
(Acts 9:15)

Can perform signs and wonders  
(Acts 2:43; 2 Corinthians 12:12)

Now, it appears as though Paul had never actually seen Jesus in the flesh during his lifetime, because the proof that Paul had seen Jesus came out of his conversion on the road to Damascus, where he saw him in a vision. This is where he claims his right to apostleship by qualifying as having seen Jesus.



**Acts 9:4:** This is Paul on the road to Damascus. He falls to the ground and hears a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asks. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting." Later, he gives this as a defense during a trial. **Acts 22:17:** In giving his testimony, he said, "After I returned to Jerusalem, I was praying in the temple and fell into a trance. I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry, leave Jerusalem, for the people here won't accept your testimony.'" He said, "I saw Jesus in a vision," and that experience on the road to Damascus is his claim that he has a right to be called an apostle because he saw Jesus in a vision two different times.



It's helpful to remember a little side note that most believe Paul was born very close to the same time, the same year as Jesus was born. So when Jesus was 33, Paul was about 33. I've always found that helpful for understanding how old Paul would have been relative to the dates different letters were written, knowing that he would match the date pretty closely in age.

Then, in the second half of **verse 1**, Paul says, "Isn't it because of my hard work that you are in the Lord?" Paul had already claimed back in chapter 4 his title of being their spiritual father. In **chapter 4**, he says this: "For even if you had 10,000 others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you." And then in **verse 2**, he makes it crystal clear that some in the Corinthian Church deny his authority to be an apostle: "Even if others think I am not an apostle..."

There are some very interesting points here. It's sad—just so sad—that he had to constantly defend his right to apostleship. But now Paul goes into defense mode, and in **verse 3** he says this: "This is my answer to those who question my authority. Don't we have the right to live in your homes and share your meals? Don't we have the right to bring a believing wife with us as the other apostles and the Lord's brothers do, and as Peter does? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves?"



There are some interesting points that we discover only here. Number one: that the apostles took their wives, and of course, implied families—children being with parents would be assumed.

Family expenses as well. Number three: that most of the apostles, it is implied, were married. Here we find two points that are clearly at odds with the Roman Catholic Church.

First, the apostles, including Peter, were married. We know Peter was married, and since the Catholic Church does not allow priests to marry, Peter, right out of the gate, broke their marriage prohibition.



The second problem is that here Paul says that Jesus's brothers were also out on the preaching circuit. We know that Jesus had at least four brothers. From **Mark 6**, we read this: "Then they scoffed, 'He's just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon, and his sisters live right here among us.'" That's six other children—Jesus makes seven. Mary and Joseph make eight and nine. There were a minimum of nine in Jesus's family. But because the Roman Catholic Church claims the perpetual virginity of Mary, which the Bible never says, they claim that these brothers listed in Mark and then again here in 1st Corinthians were either cousins of Jesus or children of Joseph from a previous marriage, which again has no scriptural support whatsoever.



One other important point here is that there were more apostles than just the eleven plus Matthias. How many we don't know for sure, but we do know there was at least one more: James, the brother of Jesus, is called an apostle in **Galatians 1:18**. It says this: "Then three years later I went to Jerusalem to get to know Peter, and I stayed with him for fifteen days."

In **Galatians 1:19**, it continues, "But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother." This indicates that James, the brother of Jesus, was also considered an apostle.

In **1 Corinthians 9:6**, Paul makes this point: "Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves?" Some could make the case that Barnabas may have been considered to be an apostle as well.



Going on to **1 Corinthians 9:7**, he's defending his claim: "What soldier has to pay his own expenses? What farmer plants a vineyard and doesn't have the right to eat some of its fruit? What shepherd cares for a flock of sheep and isn't allowed to drink some of the milk?" Am I expressing merely a human opinion, or does the law say the same thing? The law of Moses says, 'You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.' Was God thinking only about oxen when he said this? Wasn't he actually speaking to us? Yes, it was written for us, so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest."



The point that Paul is making here is obvious: soldiers don't take on a second job to cover their living expenses, farmers don't have to pay to buy their own crops, and shepherds don't go to stores to buy goat's milk. An ox gets to bend down and eat the grain as it treads it out. In like fashion, he says in **verse 10**: "Christian workers should be paid by those they serve." He develops this in **verse 11**: "Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren't we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink? If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ."

Once again, Paul's point is that even though the other apostles receive support and he also has a right to this support, he refuses to exercise it. Why? **Verse 12** says: "We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ."



Then Paul explains his right to be paid in **verse 13**: "Don't you realize that those who work in the Temple get their meals from the offerings brought to the Temple? In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it." Paul is referring here to Jesus's teaching in **Luke chapter 10**, where Jesus sends out the 72: "Don't move around from home to home. Stay in one place, eating and drinking what they provide. Don't hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay."



This fits in with the rabbinic tradition during the time of Jesus. All Jewish boys attended school, which focused on studying the Scriptures until the age of 13. Then they would serve as apprentices. After the age of 13, parents would start making arrangements for boys to do apprenticeships while they were still very young. After finishing school at 13, many would then go and live with a tradesman's family for a time, earning their keep by doing chores or menial labor as they learned a craft. Marriage was encouraged by about the age of 20 for men, much younger for girls. The Mishnah says that at about the age of 15, some begin to attend the Beit Midrash, the house of study, which was a rabbi's school or study group. Students of all ages could come, and there were quite a few who studied there but did not go on to become teachers; they were still called disciples even at advanced stages.

There were, however, just a few who were dedicated enough to spend years of time in training to become rabbinic teachers themselves. Even though marriage was strongly encouraged, some young men were so earnest in their studies that they would put off marriage until later so they could study full-time. Both Paul and Jesus fit into this tradition, setting aside marriage for the sake of their ministry.

Regarding accepting payments, it was forbidden to charge a fee to teach the Torah, so it was common for rabbis to practice a trade. Some rabbis were from priestly families, being of the tribe of Levi, so they would be paid by the Temple. There are many reports of teaching sessions held in the evenings or on the Sabbath or festival days because often men worked and studied at the same time. Some could work seasonally and take time off between planting and harvesting. Women often helped run the family farm or manage its business, giving the husband time to study. Think of the Proverbs 31 woman.

When families had a father who was a teaching rabbi, the wife would often earn the money so that her husband could spend his time in religious study. Extended families would also support a brother or a son who was engaged in study. Often disciples would travel together with their rabbi. Think of Jesus and his 12 disciples, who would take weeks away to go on teaching trips. That was common for rabbis. A disciple had to ask his wife's permission to be away from home for longer than 30 days. When they traveled, rabbis and disciples would pool their money together to buy food and other necessities. Jesus received contributions from wealthy women, and wealthy women were known for supporting other rabbis too. When they traveled, villages they taught in were expected to extend hospitality, giving them food and shelter.

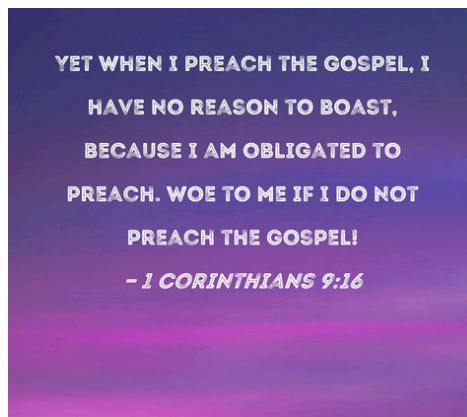
So much of this rabbinic tradition is seen in Jesus's ministry and in Paul's as well. Going on to **verse 14**: "In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it. Yet I have never used any of these rights, and I'm not writing this to suggest that I want to start now. In fact, I would rather die than lose my right to boast about preaching without charge. Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled—listen, I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News!"



Again, Paul is making the point that although he has the right to ask for financial support from the Corinthians, he will not exercise that liberty. Why? Back to **verse 12**: "If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ."



Secondly, Paul says this in **verses 16 and 17**: "For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me." Paul says in **verse 16**, "I am compelled to preach." **Verse 17** says, "I have no choice but to preach. If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust entrusted to me."



Barnes says this: "The essential idea here is that there was such a necessity that Paul could not help but to do it. The call was such, the command was such, that his life would have been miserable if he did not preach." So Paul says he deserves no reward because he was drafted and under the team, he did not volunteer. Paul's reasoning is: "What will my pay be then? What will I be paid?" I'm glad you asked. He gives that answer in **verse 18**: "What then is my pay? It is the opportunity to preach the good news without charging anyone. That's why I never demand my rights when I preach the good news. Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring them to Christ."



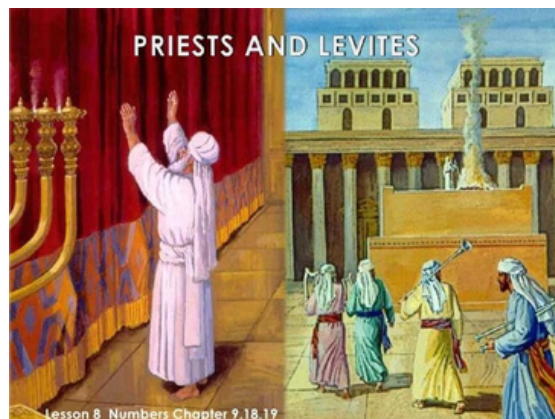


The gospel word "reward" here is better translated as "wages." So what Paul would be saying is: "What are my wages then?" Paul says it's the happiness, the joy, the fulfillment he gets in preaching the gospel without cost to anyone.

1. Note that even though Paul refused to be paid by the Corinthian Church, it was not because he was not entitled to it. He makes that point in **verses 3 and 14**. He was entitled to be paid; he just decided not to exercise that liberty.
2. Paul does not point to himself as an example that others should follow as being a better model. That's important.
3. With that said, Barnes, a commentator, says: "It is right and well for a man, if he chooses and can do it, to make the gospel without charge and to support himself."
4. But this should only ever be done where the one refusing wages can do so without ever being bitter or resentful concerning his choice. If he can't do that, he should take the salary. Greater damage is the resentment that would follow.
5. This passage should never be used by a fellowship or church members to say that ministers should not be paid or that ministers should be underpaid. Paul spends the majority of this chapter making that very point: "Don't muzzle the ox."
6. It is only right that those who are served by a minister should contribute to the support of that minister or ministers. I believe that the Old Testament provides a good rough model for how much a minister and staff should be paid. In **Numbers 18**, God tells Moses how much the people were to give to the Levites, the church workers of the day. The Levites were not allowed to earn income outside of their service to the Lord; they had no additional source of income. They were paid by what the Jewish community gave them.



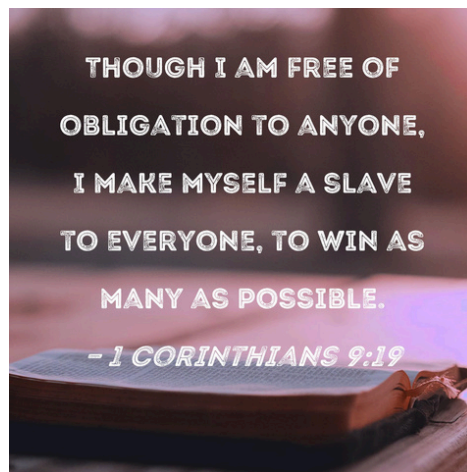
We find this in **Numbers 18:21**: "To the sons of Levi, these are the church workers, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting, 10% of all 11 tribes went to the Levites." That meant that 10% of 11 tribes would be 110%, which would go to one tribe, making an equal amount to what all the other tribes made. **Verses 25 and 26** of the same chapter say: "The Lord told me, 'When you receive from the people of Israel the tithe, give a tenth of the tithe you received, a tithe of the tithe, to the Lord as a sacred offering.'"



So to me, the Old Testament model is that those who work in ministry should be paid on a scale that would closely resemble what other church members in similar levels are paid.



Paul closes with this profound statement in **verse 19**: "Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ." Paul likens himself to a slave, serving without pay, committed wholly to Christ's mission. He emphasizes that he is not bound to obey people just because they pay him.



These verses hold significant meaning for me. When I surrendered my life to Christ at 30, I believed that God might call me into full-time ministry. My dream was to join the Billy Graham organization and help guide those who came forward at crusades. However, I knew that with my background as a car dealer, I was unqualified for such a role. I believed they might accept me if I volunteered full-time, so I prayed about becoming self-supporting.



When Dan and I were called to plant Cornerstone, the church couldn't afford to pay us, so we both became bi-vocational, working full-time secular jobs while pastoring. Over time, the church could afford to pay Dan as a full-time pastor, but I chose to remain unpaid. My experience mirrors Paul's—the joy of serving without charge and the freedom to teach the Bible without financial concerns or obligations. Paul's choice to remain unpaid was by his own choosing, not as a model for everyone.

# THE CALL TO FULL TIME MINISTRY

This passage applies to us today by guiding how we view and pay church staff, as shown by Paul and the principles in **Numbers 18**. An overarching truth is that serving in full-time paid ministry is not a higher calling than serving in a secular environment while furthering the gospel.

When I gave my life to Christ, I thought I was destined for full-time ministry, possibly even as a missionary. I imagined being called suddenly into missions. That call never came, but one day at the dealership, I shared Christ with a manager who prayed to receive Christ. That moment was a revelation—I realized God could use me where I was, in my current job. This realization was pivotal. I wasn't ready for full-time ministry; God used those years to prepare me.

The idea that full-time paid ministry is a higher calling is a fallacy. God can use us in whatever context we find ourselves, secular or otherwise. The critical point is to be open to His leading and serve faithfully wherever we are.

If you are where God wants you to be, that's the highest calling in your life. He can choreograph your interactions with people in ways I'll never experience. I've often said that I had more opportunities to share Christ in the workplace. As a businessman, I had a captive audience. Vendors sitting across from my desk were there to sell me something, but I had something far more valuable to offer them.

Think about it logically: if 80% of Christians went into full-time paid ministry, there'd only be 20% left to support them financially, which is unfeasible. So, the lesson is to bloom where you are planted. Pray that God allows you to do your best work and witness for Jesus wherever you are.

Many years ago, when I was still in business, the Gospel Messenger, a Church of the Brethren national publication, asked me to write an article on being a Christian businessman. Although they never published it, I ended the piece by expressing that I didn't know if God would ever call me away from the dealership into full-time ministry. If He did, I hoped it would be at a good time in the car business, not because I was trying to escape a problem. If you don't like your job, don't think ministry will be an escape. Some of the biggest disasters are people who went into missions because they were dissatisfied with their jobs.



Bloom where you are planted. Pray that God helps you learn all the lessons He wants to teach you there. If you're in a rough environment, remember that God might be using it to smooth your rough edges, much like a rough gem in a tumbler with other rough stones. If you leave prematurely, you'll just encounter more rough edges elsewhere.

Learn what God wants you to where you are. Those lessons will be invaluable if you ever enter full-time ministry. Whether you're a nurse, teacher, banker, lawyer, or clerk, allow God to use you in that position for His ministry. God has carefully choreographed each of us into the lives of others to reach them with the gospel.



Some of you will interact with people I'll never meet. Those individuals may never step foot in a church, but they work beside you. Don't waste those opportunities. God often uses your background skills and training for future ministry, whether full-time, bi-vocational, or in another job. Bloom where you're planted because it will likely help you in God's future plans for you.

