

Forsaking Freedoms For the Sake of Others

1 Corinthians 9:1-15a

1 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 to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 My defense to those who examine me is this:

4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink?

5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?

7 Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?

8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?

9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen, is He?

10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.

11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share [g]from the altar?



14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

15a But I have used none of these things. ...

Passage Summary:

The vehement emphasis on apostleship, the apparent introduction of the new subject of “rights” to ministerial financial support, and the series of very forceful rhetorical questions lead many to argue that Paul moves to an entirely new topic, or even that 9:1–27 constitutes part of a separate letter from 8:1–13.

Nevertheless, a variety of factors combine to suggest that **such an interpretation entirely misses the point**. The forceful, almost indignant rhetoric urging “the rights” of apostles to financial support from the church or churches which they serve reaches an anticlimax, if it is read at face value, in Paul’s conclusion that he does not, in fact, want to exercise the very “right” which he has been striving to establish. The argument about “rights” and “apostleship” simply runs parallel to Corinthian arguments about their “right to choose” (cf. 6:12; 8:1–13; 10–16) in order first to establish the validity of the “right” so that Paul, in turn, may choose to relinquish it where it threatens to harm the welfare of others, or of the church as a whole.

Thiselton, Anthony C. 2000. The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text

Outline:

- I. *Paul’s Apostolic Identity*
- II. *Paul’s Apostolic Rights*



III. Paul's Apostolic Example

- The Corinthians were unwilling to have their rights infringed upon (8:1-12). They insisted upon them even to the detriment of their brothers in Christ. What does this reveal about their hearts? What sins are present? What virtues are lacking?
 1. Entitlement. "I deserve it!"
 2. Love of the world. A craving for a *right* to some gratification that won't be denied!
 3. Pride - thinking much of yourself.
 4. We're quarrelsome and argumentative - we just want to win the argument and prove our right.
 5. A lack of love and concern for others.
 6. Self-love and selfishness.
 7. Idolatry - you've made an idol of your rights.

- Of these "*seven deadly sins of rights and liberties*" listed above, which one(s) have you struggled with the most? – and how can we gain victory in these areas?

- Paul possessed God-given rights as a minister of the gospel and as an apostle of Christ (9:1-14) - yet he didn't use them (9:12b, 15a). What does this reveal about Paul's heart?



- How can we apply Paul's example of sacrificing personal rights for the sake of others in our daily lives? What are some specific "rights" that we might forgo out of love?
- How can we cultivate a spirit of love and sacrifice in our relationships with fellow believers?
- Consider the following passage:

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; **4** do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. **5** Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. **8** Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- What actions/attitudes does Paul tell us to avoid in verse 3 and 4?
- What actions/attitudes does Paul call us to emulate in verse 3 and 4?
- How does Paul's attitude toward the Corinthians reflect the attitude of Jesus from this passage?



- In what ways is Jesus' example even greater than Paul's?
- How does this passage help us to think rightly about our rights?

Prayer Topics:

- Pray that ABC would be a church committed to loving one another with the selflessness attitude of Christ.

