

**TITLE:** A RIGHT NOT EXERCISED (A MUCH GREATER CAUSE)

**TEXT:** 1 CORINTHIANS 9

**INTRO:** This chapter continues a theme Paul is stressing from ch. 7-10 – dealing with optional matters, and understanding that freedom has its limitations. **Ch. 7** – freedom to marry, but beware of the “distress.” **Ch. 8** – freedom to eat meat, but don’t wound your weaker brother’s conscience. **Ch. 9** – freedom to receive payment as a preacher, but don’t damage your influence. **Ch. 10** – freedom to eat meat, but don’t damage the church’s name.

**I. PAUL’S RIGHTS AS AN APOSTLE (v. 1-6):**

**A. His authority as an apostle (v. 1-3)**

1. (v. 1) *Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ? Are not ye my work in the Lord?* The obvious answer – yes! And **you** (not a sign or miracle) are the evidence! This congregation existed because of Paul’s work.
2. (v. 2) Evidence of my apostleship – **you!** Some there may have doubted Paul’s apostleship, but the chapter context suggests that they knew he was an apostle, and that he’s just using this fact in order to show that he has certain rights (v. 4-14).
3. (v. 3) *My answer to them that examine me is this.* The KJV ends this verse with a comma, indicating that his reason is following in v. 4-6. The ASV ends it with a period, indicating that “*this*” (i.e., his answer) is what he had just said in v. 2. It seems that the “.” is correct, considering that v.4-6 contains questions that don’t support anything, whereas v. 2 provides his evidence – the existence of the Corinthian church.

**B. His rights as an apostle (v. 4-6)**

1. (v. 4) *Have we (apostles, preachers, leaders) not power (right, authority) to eat & drink?* This could be either a reference to **ch. 8**, or to his right to have his daily needs met by the brethren for whom he’s working (**ch. 9**). The latter seems to fit better.
2. (v. 5) *Have we not the right to lead about a sister, a wife (a Christian wife)...? Other apostles...Peter?* Peter was married (**Mt 8:14**), but he wasn’t the only one. Paul could’ve married & had kids, but this would’ve increased his need for money.
3. (v. 6) *I only & Barnabas, don’t we have the right not to work?* All these things seem to be accepted with other apostles, but not Paul & Barnabas. And all these things are about **money**, and require monetary support from the brethren (for daily needs, support of a wife & kids, not having to hold down a “regular” job). Paul had done secular work there (**Ac 18:3**), but shouldn’t have had to. In the rest of this chapter he’ll explain why he did this.

**II. PAUL’S RIGHT AS A PREACHER (v. 7-27):**

**A. His right to receive payment (v. 7-14)**

1. According to life examples (v. 7). All 3 of these examples are analogies that are used of the church. **A)** Soldiers get paid to fight (1 Tim 1:18; 2 Tim 2:3), **b)** vineyard workers get to eat the fruits of their labor (Mt 21:33-40; Lk 13:6-9), **c)** shepherds’ payment consists of a portion of the milk and meat (Jn 10; 1 Pet 5:2).
2. According to the OT law (v. 8-10). *Say I these things as a man...? Doesn’t the law say this (Deut 25:4; 1 Tim 5:18- of elders). Doth God take care for oxen? Is this really just about oxen? No! “For our sakes, no doubt, this I written!”* God intended that we would learn from the fact that we let them eat of the field that they plow.
3. According to the NT law (v. 11-14). Application: *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things (food/clothing)?* The spiritual things we provide are much greater than the physical things you can provide! Your salvation ought to be worth some food, clothing, & shelter!  
(v. 12) *If others are partakers of this right (you’ll provide it for others), are not we rather (more; greater degree)?*  
- *\*Nevertheless, we have not used this right...lest we should hinder the gospel.* The brethren were not taking care of Paul’s basic needs. This could’ve been because of a bad attitude toward him (as some had), or maybe because he wasn’t asking them to. Either way, they needed to know that they had the obligation to at least *offer* help.  
(v. 13) Don’t you know that the priests who work in the temple and serve at the altar *live* (eat) of the things of the temple? This was part of the OT system (**Lev 6:16; 10:12; Prov 27:18** – “*whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof*), and was undoubtedly the same for the pagan priests in Corinth. So why should NT preachers be different?  
(v. 14) They **aren’t** different! *The Lord hath ordained (instituted, given command) that they who preach the gospel should live (“get their living”–NAS) of the gospel (Jesus taught this in Mt 10:9-10; Paul teaches it again in Gal 6:6).*
4. And yet we have brethren today who refuse to pay the preacher, calling it sin, and even refusing to fellowship with brethren who do! It is not wrong for a preacher to refuse payment (v. 13, 15), but this is *the preacher’s decision, not the church’s!*

**CONCLUSION (PART 1):** Paul has made it clear that the preacher is worthy of payment (living of the gospel), regardless of whether or not he accepts payment. In part 2, we’ll see Paul’s explanation as to why he did not accept payment. And we’ll see that his reason is **not** completely applicable to a preacher today. \*But the church (every congregation all over the world) needs to recognize the importance of what the first part of this chapter is teaching: pay your preacher! What he does is more important than **any** job in the world – he saves souls and strengthens spiritual lives (cf. doctors who get paid millions to save & strengthen the body)!

## B. His right (& reasons) to refuse payment (v. 15-27)

### 1. For the benefit of Paul (v. 15-18)

(v. 15) *I've used none of these things.* I haven't even asked for it. I'd rather die than to take payment and make my glorying void. What glorying? Did Paul do this *in order to boast*? No, he boasted in making the gospel free (v. 18).

(v. 16) I don't glory just because I preach the gospel – I have no choice; it's my mission (**Ac 9:15-16**). This mission was given by Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul didn't seek the truth willingly...it was violently put before him on that road. He then willingly accepted it, and accepted that he had no choice but to preach!

(v. 17) If I have a choice, and I *choose* to preach, then I expect an earthly reward. But if I do it against my will (i.e., it's *not* a choice, which Paul considers to be the case), then *a stewardship is committed unto me*. Does this mean Paul had no choice at all? No. It means that Paul's calling & mission were so special and important in the scheme of Christianity that he could not but fulfill them ("woe is me if I don't"–v.16).

As a preacher today, I've given up a secular job in order to preach. I can "glory" in this – not boastfully, but knowing that I've made a good decision. And, I have the right to stop preaching and return to that secular job, and still be a faithful Christian. Paul's situation was much different. His mission as an evangelist was much more significant than mine, such that he really didn't have the same choice I do. He certainly couldn't have returned to his previous job (persecuting Christians)!

(v. 18) So what is my glory/reward, if I *have* to preach? In other words, what choice *do* I have? I'm either going to preach for payment or preach for free. So my glorying is *not* that I made a good choice to become a preacher (since that really wasn't a choice I had), but rather that I may preach for free, and make the gospel free to all!

### 2. For the benefit of the lost (v. 19-23)

(v. 19) In not accepting money, Paul says he has made himself a servant to all (which is Jesus' standard of greatness – **Mt 20:27**). He did this in order to gain more people to Christ.

(v. 20) **To the Jews** I became as a Jew (under the law). Paul did whatever he could (within Christ's boundaries) to save the Jews. He would conform to Jewish laws & customs as much as he could without violating Christ's law or damaging his influence. For example, he circumcised Timothy (to avoid potential problems–**Acts 16:3**), but not Titus, because the Jews were demanding that he be circumcised (**Gal 2:3-5**).

(v. 21) **To the Gentiles** – them who are without law (Mosaic law), I became as one without the law. But he makes sure to clarify that he *is* under the law of Christ – he would **never** violate the law of Christ in order to reach the lost.

(v. 22) To the weak I became weak. An example of this was in **8:7** (in order to reach a weaker brother, Paul wouldn't eat meat). *I am made all things to all men....* Paul would compromise whatever he could; he sacrificed anything that was optional (eating meat, marriage, receiving money). This does NOT include non-optional matters (i.e., drinking or smoking with someone in order to teach them the gospel). Paul acknowledges that he was under Christ's law, so he was not going to violate it! *I am made all things to all men that by all means I might save some*. We aren't going to save all, only some.

(v. 23) My purpose in everything is to bring salvation to you *and* me!

### 3. For the benefit of the church (v. 24-27)

a. His command (v. 24-25). *Don't you know that in a race many run, but only one wins?* He uses the Greek games as an example they would understand (people always relate to sports)!

- (v. 24) *All athletes compete, but only one wins.* Paul isn't saying only one Christian will go to Heaven – "*so run, that ye (plural) may obtain (win the prize).*" Everyone can win, but it's going to take all your effort, & willingness to sacrifice – giving up things you're not entitled to (sin), & even things you *are* entitled to (e.g., meat).

- (v. 25) *Every man (athlete) that striveth* ("agonizomai" – struggle, endeavor, fight, agonize)... He's comparing the games with Christianity, and the 1<sup>st</sup> point made is that the participant *strives, struggles, agonizes* in order to win. How much do you struggle & agonize to win spiritually?

- Next, the athlete *is temperate in all things*. He is self-controlled – he works out, & eats right, dedicating his life to winning this race, because his goal of victory is so important to him.

- And all this is for *a game!* It's temporal (a corruptible crown); it has no ultimate spiritual value! And yet this analogy is just as appropriate, if not more so, today. People won't get out of bed to worship God in a nice, comfortable, warm building, but they'll sit for 3 to 4 hours in the cold rain to watch a football game! So many people are spiritually blind & stupid, having no concern for their souls! Shouldn't we put infinitely more effort into securing our salvation – an incorruptible crown?!

b. His example (v. 26-27)

(v. 26) Paul shows himself as an example of how people *should* be. *I therefore so run* (because of the seriousness of this spiritual struggle in life), *not as uncertainly* (he knew what he was seeking). There are no doubts, no uncertainties. I don't fight like I'm just hitting the air (shadow boxing).

(v. 27) But I keep under my body (beat with a fist; subdue). Why? So I won't be a castaway. This shows that Paul is not speaking literally (physically), but spiritually. Without practicing self-control, he will be rejected even after he had preached to others. This is another of countless verses that disproves the false idea of "once saved, always saved."

**CONCLUSION:** In **ch.8** Paul taught us to think about our brethren before doing things, even things that are authorized. In **ch. 9** he has shown an example of this attitude, refusing his right to payment for services rendered. He did this because of how important salvation is to the lost, to the church, and to himself. It was so important to him that he sacrificed even his basic needs, and spiritually "beat his own body" in order to keep it in subjection. \*\*How important is victory to you? What are you willing to sacrifice? What **aren't** you willing to sacrifice? What sins do you agonize against, keeping yourself in control so they won't damage your spiritual growth toward Heaven?