

1 Corinthians 9

The Corinthian Christians were very interested in their rights and freedom. They didn't appreciate anyone telling them what to do. An overly narrow legalism was not a problem in this church. Without advocating a system of specific rules governing the details of Christian behavior, in chapters 8 – 10 Paul explains how limiting our freedom can further the cause of the gospel.

- I. As Christians, we should be willing to pay those who do Christian ministry. 9:1-14
- II. A Christian minister should, however, be willing to work without pay. 9:15-18
- III. As Christians, we should be willing to bend to fit in with the people around us. 9:19-23
- IV. As Christians, we should be living a focused, intentional life. 9:24-27

One of the keys to making an impact as a Christian is our willingness to give up our rights.

- I. As Christians, we should be willing to pay those who do Christian ministry. 9:1-14
 - A. 9:1-2 Paul's apostleship was authentic. The Corinthian church was the proof of that.
 - i. The word "apostle" is used in two ways in the NT – a general way and a more specific way.
 - 1. The general way is more or less equivalent to our word "missionary".
 - 2. The specific way has to do with an authoritative commissioning from Jesus Christ to go out and bear witness of His resurrection.
 - a. This is the kind of apostle Paul was. The Corinthians should have known it, but apparently Paul's authority was being called into question.
 - B. 9:5 The other apostles, including James and Jude (Christ's half brothers) and Peter, were all married men and their wives evidently accompanied them as they traveled.
 - C. 9:7 When you devote your life to something, it's OK to live off it.
 - D. 9:9-10 Paul consistently taught this as a principle for those in ministry.

First Timothy 5:17-18 NKJV ¹⁷*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.* ¹⁸*For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."*

- E. 9:13 At the Temple in Jerusalem, the priests lived off of the tithes, the offerings and the sacrifices. Paul is pointing out another OT precedent.
- F. 9:14 When Jesus first sent the apostles out during the time of His earthly ministry, this is what He said to them:

Matt 10:7-10 NKJV ⁷*And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'* ⁸*Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.* ⁹*Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts,* ¹⁰*nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.*

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II. A Christian minister should, however, be willing to work without pay. 9:15-18

- A. Paul never took anything from the Corinthians – and never wanted to do so.
- B. He did, however, receive gifts from other churches. Later he points out:

Second Corinthians 11:8-9 NKJV ⁸*I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. ⁹And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.*

Php 4:15-16 NKJV ¹⁵*Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.*

- C. Two reasons why Paul refused support from Corinth:
 - i. To visibly illustrate that he was not abusing his authority. By never accepting any pay from them he distanced himself from greedy or self-serving ministers.
 - ii. The carnality of the Corinthians. Paul wanted to make sure he was never indebted to them – as they may not have been able to give with a right heart.

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III. As Christians, we should be willing to bend to fit in with the people around us. 9:19-23

- A. 9:19 **I have made myself a servant to all** Compare this with what Jesus said:

Mark 9:33-35 NKJV ³³*Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, “**What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?**” ³⁴*But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. ³⁵And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “**If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.**”**

- B. 9:20 Paul was willing to conform to Jewish customs
 - i. On his second missionary journey he circumcised Timothy. (Acts 16)
 - ii. In Jerusalem He paid to have four men purified who had taken a vow. (Acts 21)
- C. 9:21 Paul never pressured Gentiles to conform to Jewish customs. At times he even quoted Greek writers in his preaching and teaching.
- D. 9:22 In chapter 8 he warned us not to cause a weaker brother to stumble.
- E. 9:23 None of this is because Paul is lacking in character or backbone. He does it for the sake of the gospel. He wants to be able to keep the gospel in focus. His flexibility removes things from his life that could be distractions to those he is trying to reach.

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IV. As Christians, we should be living a focused, intentional life.

9:24-27

- A. The Greeks loved athletic competition. The Isthmian Games were held in Corinth every two years – the year before and the year after the Olympic Games – and were second only to the Olympic Games in popularity. Just like for athletes today, a long period of intense discipline was mandatory for any who planned to participate in these ancient events. Participants for the Olympic Games had to swear by Zeus to follow ten months of strict training beforehand. Paul saw the need for similar discipline in order to back up his Christian witness.
- B. 9:26 Imagine a runner who runs with uncertainty – running a marathon but not staying on course. The result would be disqualification, even if he or she were a very good runner. How about a fighter with the hardest punch who never makes contact.
- C. We need discipline and self-sacrifice for an effective Christian life. Paul realized that his life had the potential to discredit his preaching.

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Conclusions:

Keeping the Balance on the payment of ministers:

- A mature Christian will understand the need to pay those who do the ministry so that they can serve without distraction.
- A sincere minister will not require payment as a precondition to service – and will understand that sometimes it is wisest not to accept anything for ministry.
- At Horizon Central I believe that we've been able to keep that balance.

On relating to others with flexibility:

Sometimes submitting to others is needed for the sake of the gospel. Paul considered the needs of others in order to provide a credible platform for his ministry. Here are a few principles we can try out:

- (1) Seek out ways to identify with others – while avoiding things that will certainly divide.
- (2) Be willing to listen and remember that we don't know everything.
- (3) Intentionally seek out ways to make others feel accepted.
- (4) Be sensitive to people's needs and concerns.
- (5) With all that done, look for opportunities to tell them about Christ.

On Spiritual Discipline:

Our lives are a part of our message. If we consider Paul's analogy of the athlete, we'll see that each of us is competing; we're not watching from the stands. The people of the world are the spectators – the world that badly needs Jesus. They will appreciate a disciplined, well-balanced life – a life of integrity – a life that's been transformed by God's power.