

**9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?**

**9:2 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.**

In verses 1 and 2 Paul reasserts his apostolic position through a number of questions designed in Greek to expect a positive answer (Ov + the indicative). There have been hints throughout the letter that some in the church had doubted Paul's apostolic authority (1:1, 12; 4:1-5, 8-13, 14-21; 5:1-2); these verses confirm it.

Paul not only states that he was an apostle, but he establishes his claim by (1) offering the people in the church in Corinth and (2) his road-to-Damascus-experience as proof.

Paul believed that seeing the resurrected Lord (9:1) was a qualification for anyone who claimed to be an apostle. He did not believe the experience he had on the road to Damascus was simply a vision, but was a resurrection appearance of Christ comparable to the other apostles. However, since it was after the ascension, he saw it as after its due season (15:3-8). Given this criteria, one would have to conclude that apostles in the same sense as Paul do not exist today (Fee, 397).

Secondly, Paul says that the believers in Corinth, the fruit of his apostolic labor, were themselves a seal - a sign of ownership or authenticity - that Paul was an apostle (9:2).

**9:3 My defense to those who examine me is this:**

Verse 3 clearly shows that some in Corinth had doubted Paul's apostolic position. Paul is writing a defense, but his defense is not what one would expect. He begins by establishing his rights as an apostle, and especially his right to monetary support. Then fourteen verses later, he forfeits his right to receive financial support based on other considerations.

**9:4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink?**

**9:5 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?**

**9:6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?**

Paul asks a number of questions to force the Corinthians to recognize that he had the same rights as any other apostle.

**(1) Do we not have a right to eat and drink? (9:4)**

Although it is attractive to tie Paul's "right" or "freedom to eat" with chapter 8, it flies in the face of Paul's previous conclusion; in 8:13 Paul had concluded that believers should forfeit their freedoms for the sake of the weak, not demand them. In other words, it would be somewhat strange for Paul to forcefully show that a proper Christian attitude is to forfeit freedom (rights) for the sake others (8:13) only to demand that he has such rights as an apostle (9:4). As the following context shows, Paul is insisting that as a laborer for Christ, he has the right to receive monetary remuneration for his work - he has the right to eat.

**(2) 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? (9:5)**

**(3) Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?(9:6)**

The second question about having the right to be married also ties well to the previous discussion of marriage and singleness in chapter 7. But both questions in verses 4 and 5 are probably leading up to the right of an apostle to receive support (9:7 ff.). The third question, "Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?" (9:6) makes this clear.

The gist of Paul's questions seems to be that he has the right to have a wife to accompany him and ask that the churches meet his material needs. In the verses that follow, Paul demonstrates that financial support is common in other areas of life.

Note: In verse 5 the brothers of the Lord are Jesus' half-brothers born of Mary (Mk. 6:3; Matt. 13:35) who questioned who Jesus was during His earthly ministry but believed after the resurrection (Mk. 3:31; Jn. 7:3). Cephas is Peter who was evidently married and had become someone whom some in the church in Corinth rallied behind (for this reason he is singled out).

See John Piper, *Desiring God*, 120-121

**9:7 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?**

Paul's right to financial support is proven by other common realities; a soldier isn't expected to pay his own way, a vinedresser eats the fruit of the vine and a shepherd has the right to drink the milk of the goats. So one should expect an apostle to receive back from those to whom he ministers as well.

**9:8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?**

Paul next supports his argument from Scripture. The first question in Greek expects a negative answer and the second, a positive one. Paul is not speaking from merely human wisdom but his reasoning is in agreement with the Law of God.

**9:9 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?**

**9:10 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.**

Verse 9 explains verse 8. The law says that the worker is to receive back material benefits from his labor. In ancient days an ox was used to draw a tool over grain kernels in order to remove the husks from the grain. The Israelites were not allowed to muzzle the ox while it was working. The ox received back material benefits from its labor. This, however, is intended to reveal a deeper truth. "By their very nature, the laws, which are limited in number, do not intend to touch all circumstances; hence they regularly function as paradigms for application in all sorts of human circumstances" (Fee, 408). Paul isn't reinterpreting the Law, he is applying it to the current situation. God's concern for the oxen taught a principle to all who labor; when the laborer works the field he does so in hope, for he expects to benefit from his labors.

**9:11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?**

**9:12 (a) If others share the right over you, do we not more?**

Just as the laborer in the field expects a return for his work, so does the one who sows spiritual seed. It is not too much to expect material support for having sown something of much greater value.

**9:12 (b) Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.**

In verse 12(b) Paul explains why he did not use his right as others had. Paul forfeited his right to receive support because he was fearful that it might hinder the gospel. When it comes to a choice between the unimpeded proclamation of the gospel and his personal right to receive support, there is no question in Paul's mind which to choose.

Exactly how receiving pay would hinder the spread of the gospel is not clearly stated, though verses 15-18 indicate that the free nature of the gospel is illustrated by the free offer of it. The benefits of the gospel as well as its proclamation are free from start to finish.

**9:13 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 from the altar?**

Before Paul moves on, two more illustrations come to mind. First, in Paul's day everyone knew that the priests in both pagan temples and the Jewish religious system received a portion of the offering for themselves. This is precisely the point that Paul is making. Those who perform religious services get their material sustenance from their work.

**9:14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.**

In addition to priests receiving support, Jesus also directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. In Luke 10:6, 7 He told the apostles, "If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will

return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages."

In sum, Paul has argued that he has the right to receive wages for his spiritual labor. This is in agreement with both Jesus and the Law of Moses. It is expected and proper. However, just as in the previous chapter, personal rights were not to regulate the proper course of action, neither are they to be the deciding factor here. There are things that are more important than personal rights - one is that the spread of the gospel is unimpeded.

**9:15 But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.**

Verses 15-18 get to the heart of the argument. They give the reason why Paul has rejected what is rightfully his. Paul is not arguing that it is best for those who sow spiritual seed (missionaries, pastors, evangelists, etc.) not to get paid, rather, he is arguing the principle that we should refuse any personal rights that hinder the spread of the gospel - in Paul's case, this was financial support.

*We should not lose track of Paul's argument.* The Corinthians had questioned his apostolic authority. Paul defends his authority by arguing that he had the right to receive what others in similar circumstances received; that is, he had the right to be married and to be financially supported. His refusal to use his rights did not mean that he *wasn't* an apostle; rather, it was Paul's personal choice. He felt that under his circumstances, accepting finances would hinder the gospel.

Thus, Paul was not writing a defense of his right to be paid so that the church would start supporting him financially; on the contrary, he would prefer to die than have anyone question his motive for sharing the gospel, for the gospel is what he boasted in.

**9:16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.**

Verse 16 explains what Paul's boast is (9:15) by telling his readers what it is not. Paul's boasting is not in *his* preaching the gospel. In other words, he didn't boast in the mission that God had given him and how responsibly he discharged it.

God had taken hold of him and made the desire to preach unquenchable. He was under divine compulsion to preach. It was simply his foreordained destiny which he had no control over.

**9:17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.**

Paul further explains his relationship to preaching the gospel by contrasting the "wills" of a free person and a slave.

If someone works for pay, it implies that the labor was voluntary. If Paul was paid for his labor, it too would imply that he was free to preach or not to preach. But that was not the case; he had no choice. Proclaiming Christ wasn't an option, it was a stewardship entrusted to him by his Master. Paul would preach even if he didn't want to. Being paid for his labor or not being paid wasn't an issue since he would preach the gospel regardless. Therefore, he was just as free *not* to receive remuneration as he was free to receive it. Paul chose *not* to receive it so that he could receive the "pay" he valued most (see 9:18).

**9:18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.**

Paul could not boast in his own preaching of the gospel because it wasn't his choice. Because it wasn't his choice, he had no reason to expect pay for it (9:17). Now Paul asks, what then is the reward (pay) of one who deserves no reward?

Refusing the right to be paid is not the same as saying that our labor is unrewarded. Paul's pay (or reward) was in offering the gospel without pay (18b). That is, by not exercising his rights to receive financial support, Paul was rewarded by being able to offer the gospel free of charge.

This argument highlights Paul's passion. He would not act in any way that hindered the gospel. His freedom from the financial support of others also freed him to be all things to all men in order to win some (9:19).

**9:19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.**

"The question raised here is a wider one than that of taking pay for preaching the Gospel. It is more consistent with the role of an apostle or evangelist that he should renounce his rights than that he should claim them. It is not his own advantage, or even his desires and inclinations, but those of his hearers that should govern his actions" (Barrett, 210).

**9:20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;**

"Where Jews were willing to make the law no more offensive and burdensome than necessary, Paul was prepared to abandon it altogether. It is impossible to understand Paul if this fact is not grasped. . . Paul remained in many respects not merely a Jew but a Pharisee and a Rabbi: yet he differed from all non-Christian Pharisees in that he was ready (in the interests of the Gospel, verse 23) to cease to be a Jew" (Barrett, 211).

Paul's words, "to the Jew I became a Jew, in order that I might win Jews" is striking, for Paul was a Jew. "He could *become* a Jew only if, having been a Jew, he had ceased to be one and became something else. His Judaism was no longer of his very being, but a guise he could adopt or discard at will" (Barrett, 211).

**9:21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.**

**9:22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.**

"To be a Jew is to be under the law and thereby related to God in legal terms. Paul is no longer related to God in this way; at the most he may pretend to be so related. He is *not under the law*; he behaves as if he were under the law" (Barrett, 212).

Verse 21 is one of the most important sentences in the epistle for in it "Paul

shows how the new relation to God which he has in Christ expresses his debt of obedience to God" (Barrett, 212).

"This discussion has now made clear the difficulty in which Paul found himself. He must direct the Corinthian's obedience in the way of Christ, but he must do this without permitting Christianity to become a new law" (Barrett, 214).

In verse 22 "the weak are Christians not yet fully emancipated from legalism. How then can Paul speak of winning them? Either he uses the word from force of habit, not noticing that it is inappropriate; or he gives it a new sense, meaning no longer 'win them from paganism (or Judaism) to Christianity' but 'win them from an inadequate to an adequate understanding of Christianity'; or, . . . 'keep them in the church instead of driving them out by word in their consciences'" (Barrett, 214).

**9:23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.**

Verse 23 summarizes Paul's singular passion for living - he does all things for the sake of the gospel. As the context makes clear, this means that Paul does all things so that the cause of the gospel will progress. He will remove anything that could impede its movement in *other people's* lives. But Paul *also* does all things for the sake of the gospel *so that* he himself will participate in the benefits and blessings found in it.

Paul does not assume that participation in the gospel is something that is guaranteed. Even though all are saved by God's sovereign act of grace through faith, true salvation also involves perseverance. Paul is concerned that the Corinthians' involvement in pagan temple practices is evidence that they may be disqualified. He himself runs in such a way that his own salvation is assured. In doing so, his behavior is not a hindrance to those whom he is trying to evangelize.

*9:24 -27 fills a twofold function. It concludes the previous section and introduces the opening paragraph in chapter 10 where Paul resumes the subject of eating food sacrificed to idols, which he had begun in chapter 8.*

**9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.**

Paul's example of persevering in the gospel is taken from the Greek Olympic Games. There he observes that although many people participate, only one wins. Nevertheless, all who are participating are trying to win. The believer should run the Christian life in the same way; he should not just run, but run to win the prize. This is the primary point of the whole paragraph and is illustrated in greater detail in the verses that follow.

**9:25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.**

In order to be successful, an athlete needs self-control. Paul defined this in chapter 9 as using his freedom in Christ to become a slave to all; his actions were based on what benefited others and he kept every obstacle out of the way of the message of the cross.

Verse 25 emphasizes the need of self-control and the nature of the prize. Paul is truly concerned that all who have professed Christ achieve the prize. In the case of the Corinthians, they needed to forsake those things that were not compatible with the Christian contest. Athletes are willing to do this for a prize that perishes, how much more should the believer be willing to do this for that which never passes away.

**9:26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;**

**9:27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.**

Paul applies the principles he has just stated to his own life. His willful enslavement to others, living life in a way that benefits them, is a purposeful self-discipline that is not without aim. To do this, Paul *makes* his body serve the purpose of the gospel. His goal is that in the process of fulfilling the task that God had divinely called him to, he might not fall short of receiving the prize himself.

Some wonder if Paul really means that a believer can be disqualified and not receive eternal life. In 10:13 Paul assures believers that they will be able to endure, but the threat here is real. Paul is challenging all who *profess* Christ to be sure that they are truly saved by demonstrating Christ-like behavior. It is not up to the believer to keep himself saved, nor can a believer lose his salvation, but what appears to be real salvation at first may prove to be superficial, evidenced through lives that are not transformed. Being "disqualified" is simply manifesting the godlessness of our own lives through our actions. Paul maintains a healthy tension between being over-confident in a false salvation and having assurance that the saved will not fail the test.