

“For the Gospel’s Sake”

1 Corinthians 9:1-27

Everything done by us as individuals, and by us as a corporate body of believers (the local church), is to be done for the glory of God and the way to truly glorify God in all that we do is get the gospel of Jesus Christ to those that need it (the unsaved), as well as to those that already have it (the church).

The Apostle Paul finds himself having to defend his authority as an apostle to the church in Corinth and he does so with a call to the gospel. He declares to the church in this letter that all he does he does “for the gospel’s sake.” The question to be asked for the church today, especially the leadership of the church, is what we do, both individually (in our own personal lives) and as a church, done for the “gospel’s sake?”

This portion of the letter seems to be an extension of the end of the previous portion (chapter eight). He is continuing on with the teaching that all he did in Corinth was for the sake of others, and as verse thirteen ended, if it would make his brother to stumble in their faith he was not willing to do that thing that would have that outcome even if he had the right (biblically and morally) to do so. He approaches the next issue addressed to him by the church with that in mind.

Verse three is a critical verse for this portion of the letter – it demonstrates the justification, so to speak, for he has to say in his own defense. There are those that say we shouldn’t defend ourselves, and that is especially said of the pastor/teacher, it seems. It is taught, and believed, that the pastor is to be like Jesus when He stood before the accusers

at His trial and didn't answer their accusations. The problem with that argument is that not only is it not valid according to the preponderance of scriptural evidence, it is completely misunderstanding the trial Jesus faced. He did, in fact, answer the charges that were brought against Him when He was ordered to by the high priest (the judge of the trial, so to speak) – He did defend Himself when it was legally appropriate to do so (Matt. 26:63-64).

Some say this verse belongs to the preceding two verses (Alford, Clarke, etc.), while others have it with what follows. Some translations of the Bible (as is the text of the KJV, NASV, ISV, and others) end in either a comma or colon, demonstrating that it goes with what follows, while others end in a period, showing it could be either way. It doesn't matter to the interpretation of the verse – I hold that it is for both what preceded and what follows, thus making it that critical verse.

The word for "answer" (ἀπολογία) is where our word "apologetics" comes from and is one that means a reasoned statement or argument. "The words are forensic; and the apostle considers himself as brought before a legal tribunal, and questioned so as to be obliged to answer as upon oath" (Clarke). The word for "examine" (ἀνακρίνω) is a combination of two words that mean to discern or judge (in this context). The Apostle Paul spends a good deal of time with his reasoned argument as to both why he deserves to be recognized as an apostle, and, more to the extent of the context, as to why he had the authority (literally, the right) to expect financial remuneration from the church. His defense is to answer those that were calling the very truth of the Word of God and the gospel into question and using his own personal choices against him as evidence.

There are going to be times when we will face the

need to defend ourselves when what we are being accused of is going to call into question the work of the Lord in our lives and bring shame to His name.

I. SOME WILL QUESTION OUR MINISTRY – VS. 1-2

A. When questioned, our response will, at times, necessitate a defense of our authority (specifically speaking of the pastor/overseer in the context).

B. He asks four somewhat rhetorical questions in verse one – questions that the answer should have been obvious and known to the church. It appears, however, that there was some question as to the purpose of his ministry, and the authority he had to teach them (which, more to the point, would mean they would have to follow – something they may not have been inclined to do at this point). It is this foundation that he lays in defense of his authority that will be needed, at times, in the ministry today.

1. First question (and the one upon which the others are built) – “Am I not an apostle?” This is an issue he was confronted with on numerous occasions, and he defended it more than once.

a) The word “apostle” – ἀπόστολος – is one that simply means to send. It is used synonymously at times with presbutés – messenger or ambassador. “The Lord chose the term apostoloi to indicate the distinctive relation of the Twelve Apostles whom He chose to His witnesses because in Classical Greek the word was seldom

used. Therefore, it designates the office as instituted by Christ to witness of Him before the world. It also designates the authority which those called to this office possess." (Zodhiates)

"An apostle was one that was immediately sent by Christ, and had his authority and doctrine directly from him, and had a power of working miracles from him, in confirmation of the truth of his mission, authority, and doctrine; all which were to be found in the author of this epistle, who did not thrust himself into this office, or take this honour to himself, of which he always judged himself unworthy, but was "called" to it according to the will, and by the grace of God..." (John Gill)

- b) We may not have apostles, as those were in Scripture, and that particular office may not exist today in its New Testament form (we could say a church-planter missionary would fit the New Testament apostle to some degree), but we are still commissioned with the same purpose – to preach the gospel.

Acts 9:15

15 But the Lord said unto him, **Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:**

Acts 13:2

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

2. "Am I not free?"

- a) "Free within the limits of delegated authority" (Morgan). "Free as a Christian from Mosaic ceremonialism as much as any Christian and yet he adapts his moral independence to the principle of considerate love." (Robertson)
- b) He is pointing out to them that he was at liberty to do and to teach what he deemed necessary for the church under the authority of Christ for he was one of His apostles. This was to counteract their defense of the position they had taken that they were free to do what they wanted, including sin, because they had liberty in Christ.

"Before he proceeds any further in his purposed matter of things offered to idols, he would show the cause of all this evil, and also take it away. That is, that the Corinthians thought that they did not have to depart from the least amount of their liberty for any man's pleasure. Therefore he propounds himself for an example, and that in a matter almost necessary. And yet he speaks of both, but first of his own person. If (he says) you allege for yourselves that you are free, and therefore will use your liberty, am I not also free, seeing I am an apostle?" (Geneva Bible notes)

- c) We, today, in the true New Testament church, need to be very cautious in our use of Christian liberty that we don't use it to satisfy our own desires. We are free, as the Apostle Paul was, but we are under the same "law of liberty" as all other believers.

[James 1:25](#)

²⁵ But whoso looketh into the perfect law

of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

James 2:12

¹² So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

- d) Within the greater context of the chapter, he was also pointing out to the leadership of the church that he was free to abstain from labor outside of the ministry, as the other apostles obviously had done (seen in the next several verses).

“The ‘liberty’ referred to here is doubtless the privilege or right of abstaining from labor; of enjoying as others did the domestic relations of life; and of a support as a public minister and apostle. Probably some had objected to his claims of apostleship that he had not used this right, and that he was conscious that he had no claim to it. By this mode of interrogation, he strongly implies that he was a freeman, and that he had this right.” (Barnes)

3. “Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?”

- a) This is the one that would have brought into question his apostleship as it was determined or defined in the New Testament period.
- b) It could be that the leadership at Corinth were following the speech by Peter recorded in Acts 1:15-22, where he proposed that the only one qualified to be an apostle would be one that was with Him from beginning to end (as the other 11, and Judas Iscariot were). Based on Paul’s own

inspired writing, this assumption was wrong, and the choosing of Matthias seems to have been in error. Paul himself seems to indicate this in 1 Cor. 15:8 where he says that Jesus was seen of him, "as one born out of due time."

- c) Considering the writings of Paul as a whole, and the obvious approval of God on his ministry as one of the 12 Apostles, the only part of the portion of Acts 1 that seems to give things that would prove apostleship is that an apostle needed to simply have seen Jesus bodily. If being taught by him was also required, he would have fit that prerequisite as well, for it is likely that what is referred to in Gal. 1:15-18 in the mention of Arabia is where Paul received his revelations and teaching from Jesus.

(1) He saw Him on the road to Damascus.

Acts 9:3-5

³ And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

⁴ And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, **Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?**

⁵ And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, **I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.**

(2) He saw Him in Corinth when he founded the church.

Acts 18:9-10

⁹ Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, **Be not afraid, but**

Speak, and hold not thy peace:

10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

(3) *He saw Him in the dungeon in the castle in Rome.*

Acts 23:11

11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, **Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.**

4. "Are ye not my work in the Lord?"

- a) If there was any question as to whether he had the authority to teach them the truth of Christ it would have been the very fact that they received the message of the gospel from him. He not only brought them to Christ, he spent a year and a half teaching them – and now they were questioning his authority? He seems more than a little upset about that.
- b) This question (and what is recorded in the next verse) shows that those that should be the closest to us, those upon which we have a direct effect with their spiritual teaching, can, and too often do, turn against us and question that authority.

Acts 18:8–11

8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, **Be not afraid, but speak, and**

hold not thy peace:

¹⁰ For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

¹¹ And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

C. In verse two he expands on his defense of his apostleship, pointing out the Corinthian believers that if he was a true apostle to any church, it would have been them – they themselves were the proof (seal) of that very apostleship.

1. The word “seal” (σφραγις) is one that refers to a signet-ring that would have been used to make an impression in melted wax to indicate the source of what was sealed.
2. The believers in the church as individuals, and the church as a whole, were to all those that would question his authority, and in the case of the use of the word “seal,” his authenticity, proof that he was truly a biblical apostle.
3. By application today, the proof that we are what God wants us to be is the fruit that we bear for Christ.

Galatians 5:22–23

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Conclusion to this point: What about us? If we are examined by our neighbors, our friends, our co-workers, our families, would we be able to make a reasoned argument for why we should be considered a follower of Christ? Do we have the characteristics of an apostle, as one sent with a message to the lost? Do we use our liberty in Christ to further His kingdom, or ours? Do those around us sense that we have been with Christ, that we know Him in a personal way? Do they see our work in the Lord?

II. SOME WILL QUESTION OUR MOTIVATION – VS. 3-18

A. When questioned, our response should be that we are motivated by nothing more than the gospel.

B. It would seem that, in the letter Paul received from the Corinthians for which this letter is a response, he was asked about why some (of the pastor/elders of the church in Corinth) were taking a financial gain from them when he did not.

III. SOME WILL QUESTION OUR METHODS – VS. 19-27

A. When questioned, our response should be to simply keep doing what is right.