

“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. Even though we may have liberty (the right) to do something (as seen in chapter 8, as well as earlier in our study of First Corinthians) it isn't always advisable to do so, and if it will cause a weaker believer to stumble, or if it will cause an unbeliever to reject the gospel, we need to make sure we take that into account when we feel the need to exercise those rights in Christ.

B. It would seem that, in the letter Paul received from the Corinthians for which this letter is a response, the question was raised as to why some (of the pastor/elders of the church in Corinth) were taking a financial gain from them when he did not. In response, he illustrates his previous point regarding not doing anything that would cause his brother to stumble in their faith.

A point needs to be made here regarding the one, right interpretation of this text. Considering the point he makes in verse one regarding his authority as an Apostle, Paul is addressing a particular issue. He uses the word "gospel" ten times in these verses, and it seems to be a specific point. If there is any specific thing this points to it is that of what we term "missionaries" today – those whose intent purpose and ministry is to preach the simple truth of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to those that have not heard. This is one text that can be used for the financial support of missionaries. That this is not just dealing with the 12 Apostles is clear by the inclusion of Barnabas in the argument (he was not one of the Twelve). Barnabas is, however, called an "apostle" in Acts 14:14 because he was sent forth by the church – used in its technical definition (Acts 13:3) – so that would indicate that the term had grown past the original twelve. Having been commissioned by the Lord Himself (Acts 9) to preach the gospel, Paul is uniquely qualified to be a true apostle (and, as far as I'm concerned, one of the Twelve – the one to have taken Judas Iscariot's place rather than Mathias).

Acts 14:14

¹⁴ Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

Acts 13:3

³ And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

To a broader application, we can apply this

text to those that devote their lives to the ministry of the Word of God to those that have received the gospel – Galatians 6:6 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18 point to this. Verse thirteen of this text before us also shows it has a broader application when the work of the priests in the temple is invoked.

Galatians 6:6

⁶ Let him that is taught in the word communicate [share] unto him that teacheth in all good things.

1 Timothy 5:17-18

¹⁷ Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

¹⁸ For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

The Apostle Paul chose not to accept gifts of support so that he did not hinder the gospel's affect on the lost in the very early infancy of the church, but as can be seen from 2 Cor. 12:13, even he knew that might have been in error.

C. No matter what others say about what the minister does (be it a missionary taking the gospel to those that have not heard, or a pastor equipping the saints in a church), there are reasons given in this letter to the Corinthian believers that establish the biblical principal of remuneration (money paid for work or a service).

D. Along with those principles are reasons for them – those reasons are given in

verses four and five. Part of the Christian leader's motivation is given here, and even if it is questioned, the right is still there to expect these things.

1. Verse four – Do we not have the right to eat and drink – to have those basic needs met like everyone else that works hard at their job?
 - a) "Have we not power" – "Is it so, that we have not power... It may perhaps be used as pointing out a matter of *right*, which any would have had on the same conditions... (Alford)
 - b) "To eat and drink" – "at the cost of the churches" (Alford): not with any reference to the eating of things offered to idols, nor to Jewish distinctions of clean and unclean" (Alford).

Adam Clarke says this: Meat and drink, the necessities, not the superfluities, of life, were what those primitive messengers of Christ required; it was just that they who labored in the Gospel should live by the Gospel; they did not wish to make a fortune, or accumulate wealth; a living was all they desired.

Barnes makes this observation: To be maintained at the expense of those among whom we labor. Have we not a right to demand that they shall yield us a proper support? By the interrogative form of the statement, Paul intends more strongly to affirm that they had such a right. The interrogative mode is often adopted to express the strongest affirmation. The objection here urged seems to have been

this, "You, Paul and Barnabas, labor with your own hands. Act_18:3. Other religious teachers lay claim to maintenance, and are supported without personal labor. This is the case with pagan and Jewish priests, and with Christian teachers among us. You must be conscious, therefore, that you are not apostles, and that you have no claim or right to support." To this the answer of Paul is, "We admit that we labor with our own hands. But your inference does not follow. It is not because we have not a right to such support, and it is not because we are conscious that we have no such claim, but it is for a higher purpose. It is because it will do good if we should not urge this right, and enforce this claim." That they had such a right, Paul proves at length in the subsequent part of the chapter.

2. Verse five – Do we not have the right to be married and have a family, and to be able to care for them effectively?

a) "To lead about" – to take around as a companion

(1) Again, staying with that one right interpretation of this dealing with the ones that preach the gospel to the lost (as missionaries do today), they had a right to have their wives (and families) with them as they traveled, and an expectation of financial support to enable them to do so.

(2) By application today, the pastor has the same right, and considering the work that many pastor's wives do, the church would be far less than it is without them.

"Today, pastors' wives are partnering with their husbands in key areas of ministry; they are using their gifts and skills that they might have used in the market place. Yet, these remarkable women of faith are rarely recognized for their efforts. One of the most neglected groups in all of Christendom is the pastor's wife. At times being the pastor's wife can be the most isolated and lonely place on earth. A large percentage of pastors' wives say that they're lonely." (Tony Evans)

- b) "A sister, a wife" – a believing wife; a wife that is a believer; a sister as a wife (this indicates that a man called into the ministry was to make sure he chose a faithful Christian woman for his wife.

(1) The term "sister" is pointing to the principle that the wife of an apostle (and by application, a pastor) must be a Christian. This was relative at the time, considering how many new converts there were in the church and that not all of the spouses would have been converted at the same time (an issue that was addressed in chapter seven), and it seems that some of the leaders even had unconverted wives.

(2) The term "wife" is self-explanatory – this is in contrast to those that may make a decree or dogma that exempts pastors from being married. This also would contradict the idea that a woman can be a pastor or teach in a position that a pastor would have (pastoral authority, in other words).

(3) There is a somewhat corresponding

text in the Pastoral Epistles relating to the wives of the leadership of a church that will add some light on this point (specifically said of a deacon's wife but the implication in that text is also for the pastor's wife).

1 Timothy 3:11

11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

- (a) "Grave" – This word means to be honest, to be venerable, or when the life is tried, or when trials come, one is to be found honest – also translated "dignified" and "reverent"
- (b) "Not slanderers" – this comes from the same word as does the word "devil" (in fact, it's translated "devil" 35 times in the New Testament) – where we get our English word "diabolical" (by definition, evil as from the devil). It means false accuser – translated by some as "malicious gossips." The pastor's wife is to be as supportive of the church as the pastor.
- (c) "Sober" – this word is different than the one in verse two relating to the pastor. It is the same, however, as the word "vigilant" in that verse. This word means to be temperate, abstinent, especially in respect to wine; hence, sober in mind, watchful, circumspect. This speaks to the point that the pastor's wife is to be so in control of her person that her mind is not clouded over with a preoccupation as one that is drunk

would be.

(d) "Faithful in all things" – this one is self-explanatory. When it's all said and done, the wife of the pastor is to be found to have been a faithful companion to her husband, and faithful in her duties to the Lord and to the church. This point shows that, as a helper alongside her husband, she is to be found faithful in all she does so as to not bring shame and reproach to her husband, to the church, and, most importantly, to the Lord.

c) "And as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?"

(1) *"The brethren of the Lord" is speaking of His earthly brothers (some say this can also be cousins, or near kinsman, but a verse in Matthew seems to indicate otherwise as a connection is made with Mary, His mother) – James, Joses, Simon, and Judas.*

Matthew 13:55

⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

(a) James is most likely the leader of the church at Jerusalem and would have presided over the first church council held in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 15.

Acts 15:13

¹³ And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying,

Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

- (b) There is much speculation on his identity, and this is not the place to go into all the details on the issue. What is important in this context is that whoever the brethren of the Lord were, they were known well enough by those in the church at Corinth for them to be used as an illustration (and it might be added that they were not all apostles, and most likely would have been simply leaders in the church).
- (c) "And Cephas" – this was Peter, a significant figure in the church and already used as an illustration in chapter three.

Concluding remarks: No matter what your service to the Lord, whether it is in "full-time" Christian service, lay leadership in the church, or just being a faithful servant to the Lord in help to the church, we are all motivated by different purposes and those motivations may be called into question from time to time. If we feel the need to defend those motivations, make sure we do so with Scripture.

For the ladies here that serve, maybe along side your husbands, or by yourself, you have a major part in what the Lord can do, both in this church and then through this church to the world.

[Philippians 4:3](#)

³ And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the

gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.

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

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