

# 1 Corinthians 9:1-18

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. If you want to keep your Bibles open to 1 Corinthians 9, that's where we're going to spend our time this morning. Pastors and money.

It's an interesting subject, a touchy one in a lot of churches. It's one that pops up in the news frequently as well. I was reading an article from a little over a year ago on the Huffington Post that was outlining the superstar, you know, rock star pastors and the kinds of things that they get from their ministry.

\$17.5 million private jets, 1,700 square foot mansions, million dollar salaries. It certainly paints an extreme of what it's like to be a pastor.

Of course, there's always the opposite extreme. In fact, most pastors are on the opposite extreme. There are always exceptions. One that pops into mind is Rick Warren, who, after he hit it big in 2005, bucked the trend.

He paid back his previous 25 years of salary to his church and then decided to not take any more salary ever. And he tithes 91% of his earnings.

[ 1 : 29 ] A lot of pastors are sort of who haven't made it big. Serve as examples, though. I mean, I can think of a few who, you know, kids in college could stand a little extra income, but who refuse guest speaking honoraria or royalties on books as a result of wanting nobody, including themselves, to question whether they're in this job for the money.

And that's what Paul is confronting here. So I want to take a look here at 1 Corinthians 9 and his defense of his decision to refrain from payment. I'm going to look at it in two sections.

Verses 1 to 14 are his defense of his rights to payment. As a minister, a right he describes elsewhere in places like 1 Timothy 5. And in verses 15 to 18, he elaborates on his reasons for his restraint.

And he actually continues this discussion, and we're going to continue it next week with the rest of the chapter. But the focus today, his defense of his rights and his defense of his restraint.

Now, before I dig into this, I want to make sure we remember our context. We were in chapter 8 last week. And so this chapter comes in the middle of a discussion that started in chapter 8 and actually continues in chapter 10 about giving up idle food, giving up one's rights, one's freedoms, to prevent your brother from stumbling.

[ 3 : 07 ] So he starts this discussion in chapter 8 and actually continues it into chapter 10. But chapter 9, which a lot of people think is sort of a digression, I actually don't think is.

I think it's actually the key to that larger discussion. Why would he compel the Corinthian church to give up their rights? Well, at the end of chapter 8, he holds himself up as an example.

I've given up eating meat for the sake of my brother. Let me continue on that train of thought. Let me show you some rights I have as an apostle that I'm giving up.

And let me explain to you why. Because that is the key to why you should be willing to give up your rights. And so that's what we start here in chapter 9. Section 1, he begins with an incredibly logical argument.

I mean, this is just rhetorically beautiful, the way he does this. He sets up these very leading, suggestive questions in which the expectation is the Corinthian church is going to come along with him and say, absolutely, yes.

[ 4 : 16 ] You've asked a question, Paul. You know the answer is yes. Look at the first verse. Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?

Are you not my workmanship in the Lord? He asks these questions. They have no choice but to say, yes, of course you are. And he defends it. Your very existence as a church is proof that I have apostolic authority, that I have apostolic rights.

And so he continues. 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.

And so this is my defense to those who would examine me if they were questioning my apostleship. I know you aren't in Corinth, but the others who would, this is my defense.

You. You are my defense. And so he begins with his rights. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and brother of the Lord and Cephas?

[ 5 : 24 ] Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? So the issue's there. Wait a minute.

Aren't we supposed to be able to get paid for doing ministry like everybody else who does? You know, they participate in the church feast. They actually get their nourishment, their food and their drink from the church.

They're allowed to take along believing wives who work beside them and support them. Or, you know, even if they're not doing those things, when the church gathers, wherever the church gathers, and there's a communal fund for the good of the church, the pastors earn their salary from that communal fund.

These are my rights as an apostle. And so he actually defends them. And that's how he spends the rest of these verses here. Defending those rights. And he does it in four ways.

Taking a break in the middle to sort of reiterate his point. But let's look at the four reasons. Verse 7. It makes sense. Look around. Soldiers don't pay their own salary. They don't pay their own way.

[ 6 : 38 ] Farmers don't walk past their crops to Dominic's to get their produce. They take from their produce. It makes sense. It's efficient. Verse 8 to 10.

Reason number two. Not only is it sensible, it's in the law. Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 25 verse 4. You don't punish an ox for doing his job any more than you punish a laborer by withholding his wages when he does his job.

Paul actually makes that point in 1 Timothy 5. It's actually in the law. If you do the work, you should get your reward from the work. He takes a break in 11 to 12 to reiterate his grander point.

I'm going to come back to that. But let's take a look at reason 3, verse 13. It's not just the law. It's how God organized the temple. Priests and Levites take their rations from the sacrificial food.

Notice his phrasing. Do you not know? He's actually used this sentence construction eight times in the letter. It's like his other rhetorical questions above. It's a leading question.

[ 7 : 50 ] Do you not know? Well, of course they knew that this is how God arranged the wage scheme for temple priests. Of course they knew that. Reason four.

And this is the one that sort of seals the deal, if none of the others did. By the way, Jesus himself commanded it. Matthew 10.10, Jesus gives preachers the right to seek provision from the ministry.

And so Paul declares his rights using a very emphatic rhetorical strategy and then grounds those rights in logic, the law, the Jewish religion, and the command of Jesus. But as we've skipped in verses 11 and 12, the issue is not the right to wages.

The issue, the argument he's making, is his defense of giving up that right to seek wages or provision from the churches where he's been preaching.

He's actually not taking a salary, and that's causing a problem. Why? So we get to his reason. Why did Paul forego his right to seek provision from the churches and the people to whom he preached?

[ 9 : 04 ] I think he anticipated this, and that's part of the reason he's confronting it head-on in this letter. That decision was going to cost him. See, the educational system in the first century was such that most people didn't go to schools, or if they did, they only did so at a young age.

Most education was done by private tutoring. Philosophers, logicians, grammarians, tutors, they would wander around city to city, and they would set up shop in a public place, and they would preach a demonstration sermon, or they would teach a demonstration lecture, hoping to gather students, who then would pay them to tutor the students privately, usually for huge amounts of money.

I mean, these were some of the better-paid people in first-century society. It looked a lot like how Paul did his ministry. And so when he shows up and says, by the way, I'm not going to take an honorarium, it's going to cause a question among the people.

Like, hold on a second. This guy must not be worth listening to. His message must not be worth anything if he's not even able to charge, like, minimum wage for it. And so it breeds a skepticism.

So why did he do it? Verse 15. It's a reiteration of what he says in 11 and 12. But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision, for I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting.

[ 10 : 46 ] Love is reasoning here. I'm not making use of this right. And just in case you think this is some kind of clever, reverse psychological ploy to get you to give me a bonus, no.

I would rather die than take your money. But he doesn't actually say, I would rather die than take your money. He says, I would rather die than let you deprive me of my grounds for boasting.

See, this is a reference to earlier moments in the letter where he's already brought up boasting. Remember chapter 1, 26 to 31. If you want to turn back there, I'm going to read that.

Chapter 1, 26 to 31. For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

[ 11 : 53 ] God chose what is low and despised in the world. Even things that are not to bring nothing to things that are. So that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

See, one of those low things would be a preacher who has no wages. And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

So that, as it is written, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. There's only one valid boasting point. It's the gospel. Of course it seems foolish.

Of course it seems weak. But that's how God worked. And if you were boasting in anything else, you've missed God's wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

You see it there? That's what Paul thinks. Of course, the Corinthians have found other reasons to boast. And we can trace that through the letter.

[ 12 : 54 ] See 321, 4-7. Paul gives them a little bit of a smack down in 5-6 Corinthians. Your boasting is no good. You're boasting in the wrong things. He continues the argument though.

Verse 16. For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. See, Paul is compelled by the gospel to preach the gospel.

He can't help it. It's a compulsion. It's his calling. And to do it for pay would be to cheapen it.

It would actually be to cheapen the calling and the nature of the work. He makes that point in 17 and 18. For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward.

But if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with stewardship. Then is my reward that in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge. so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

[ 14 : 01 ] What reward does Paul want? Nothing. He doesn't want any money. Preaching the gospel is the reward for preaching the gospel.

He actually reiterates this point a little bit later in the chapter. Look down at verse 23. I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings.

His reason for restricting his own rights is the compulsion. It's the pull. It's the unavoidable call of the gospel.

So his question, am I free? Yeah. So is the gospel. So as I look to conclude, I want to challenge us in a couple ways.

Both sides of this thing. One, what is the gospel called you to? Are you doing it? What's your gospel compulsion?

[ 15 : 02 ] See, not everybody's called to preach on Sunday or to go door to door and read tracts with people. That's the particularity of gospel mission, of course.

But, if the gospel has made a difference in your life, it's calling you to something. It's calling you to articulate it to somebody, somewhere, sometime.

if you really know, if you really believe that Christ died and rose again to save you from your sin so that you may know God, be right before God, be in his presence and enjoy him for all eternity, then yeah, that message is compelling you to share it with somebody.

I think of Acts chapter 8 as a great moment in church history where, after the stoning of Stephen, the Christians disperse.

They flee the city of Jerusalem. The apostles actually stay in Jerusalem. It's everybody else who goes. And it's the people who go in terror who evangelize.

[ 16 : 24 ] It comes back up again in chapter 11, 19 to 21, that many people from all over the world were becoming Christians because of these average Christians, not the apostles, because of these average Christians who went out evangelizing.

They were compelled to do something about it. So once again, how is the gospel compelling you? How are you being challenged to open your mouth and articulate the good news?

Second, from the other side, remember this whole chapter is in the context of a larger discussion about rights and restraint.

He's turned the whole discussion on the idea of restraining oneself for the sake of his or her brother's or sister's integrity. And now, for the sake of the gospel.

So once again, what sacrifices are you willing to make for your gospel compulsion? We have rights. Corinthians had rights. Paul had all kinds of rights as a Roman citizen, as an apostle. We have rights.

[ 17 : 35 ] I mean, we have unprecedented rights and capacity to enjoy those rights as Americans. Yet, we can give up those rights.

Restraint can be voluntarily adopted. A gospel compulsion to spread the gospel can even overcome our rights. let me pray.

Our Father in Heaven, thank you for sending your Son, your Son who emptied himself so much in order to save us. Give us wisdom and love to restrain ourselves, to give up freedom for the sake of others and for the sake of the gospel and to do so out of a compulsion to enjoy the rewards of the gospel.

Pray this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.