

1 Corinthians Chapter 9

NKJV Notes by **Pastor Bob Caldwell**

A Pattern Of Self-Denial (Verses 1-18)

v.1 Am I Not - This statement begins a chapter long illustration of what Paul had said in 8:13. There he had taught how love becomes a motivation for self-denial of those things that a believer has a right to but is willing to deny that right if it will foster a benefit to another believer.

Apostle - Paul points to his apostleship which provides certain privileges that he has been willing to deny if it would benefit those he has called to serve.

Free - Paul refers here to the rights and privileges he is free to embrace as an apostle.

Seen Jesus Christ - The qualification of having personally seen the Lord is clearly taught as one of the key qualifications of being an apostle. (Acts 1:21,22; 22:14,15; 26:16; 1 Cor. 15:8) This had been Paul's experience as seen in Acts 9:3-5,17.

v.2 Seal of My Apostleship - The term seal was used in Paul's day to validate ownership or truthful conveyance of property. It would be similar to the seal of a notary in validating a signature. Here Paul is saying that what God had done through him in the conversion of the Corinthians and the establishment of the church he left for them as a proof of his apostolic calling.

v.3 Who Examine - "anakrino" (Gk.) This was a word used in reference to judges who were deciding litigation on a matter presented to them. The context here is that there were those in the church who were questioning Paul's claim as an apostle.

v.4 To Eat and Drink - Paul begins here and continues to the end of the chapter referring to those things he has denied that he had the right to as a believer and as an apostle. What had arisen in Corinth was the view that the reason Paul did not take advantage of his right as an apostle was because he must have been conscious of the fact he was not an apostle. Here Paul begins by referring to the foods he said in 8:13 he would not partake of that none the less he had the right to.

v.5 A Believing Wife - Paul refers to what he taught in 7:7-8 that he had denied the right of being married because he believed it gave him greater liberty in fulfilling God's call upon his life (7:29-35). However, this decision of Paul's had been seen by some as the result of him not having the right to expect financial support that would be required for a family because he was not worthy of that support.

Brothers of the Lord - This refers to the sons of Mary and Joseph that were born to them after the virgin birth of Christ. They are referred to in Matthew 13:55 as James, Joses, Simon and Judas. We know that individually they did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah (John 7:5; Mark 3:21) yet from this passage it becomes clear that after the resurrection they all not only believed but became involved in serving the early church.

Cephas - This was another name for Peter (John 1:42). From this passage we see Peter was a married man as is also attested in Matthew 8:14. Thus we see it was the common practice of those serving in leadership to be married and Paul was an exception to this not because he had no right to expect support for the cost of a family but rather because of his unique call given by Jesus to live the life he lived that would have been very difficult to a family.

v.6 Barnabas - Paul had a long and fruitful relationship with Barnabas as a co-laborer for Jesus Christ. It was Barnabas who first introduced Paul to the leadership of the early church (Acts 9:26,27) invited Paul to help in ministry to the first Gentile church (Acts 11:19-26) and traveled together on Paul's first missionary journey. (Acts 13:1-2)

Refrain From Working - As Paul traveled to new cities to evangelize and seek to establish a church he would often support himself by finding work as a tentmaker. (Acts 18:1-3) However, this was not the common practice of the other apostles. This caused some to see Paul taking on a paying job as a proof that he did not warrant the financial support that was commonly given to those in leadership in the early church.

v.7 His Own Expense - Paul gives several examples to show he has a right for financial support. First he uses the example of a soldier who is sent to battle since the ministry itself is also seen as a warfare and the servant of Christ as a soldier (1 Tim. 1:18) Just as a nation owes support to a soldier who devotes himself for the defense of that nation through hard and dangerous work, the true servant of Christ is in a battle for the souls of men and is worthy of the support of those who benefit from his dedication to that fight.

Plants a Vineyard - Paul's second example is from the work of a vinedresser. This illustration is also in harmony with God's view of the world as a field ripe for harvest (John 4:35-36) and the people of God as the planting of the Lord. Paul points out that it would be ridiculous for anyone to expect a farmer to work day and night to produce a beautiful and productive crop and not expect to be maintained by the proceeds of harvesting of that crop.

Tends a Flock - Paul's third example is of a shepherd which is again a often used picture of the people of God as sheep "we are the people and the sheep of His pasture." (Ps. 95:7) Paul reminds them of the common sense expectation of a shepherd who has cared for a flock of sheep and enabled them to be well fed and managed so as to produce milk to then not be able to share in that milk.

v.8 As a Mere Man - Paul points out here that the basis of his reasoning is not from a self serving agenda but instead it is based upon God's word.

v.9 Not Muzzle - A muzzle was put over an animal's mouth to keep it from eating or biting. The thought behind the passage quoted (Deut. 9:20) is to require basic kindness to an animal that is working for the profit of it's owner. It is only reasonable that if an oxen is working treading corn or wheat that it be given the right to eat some of that grain to strengthen it as it works.

Is It Oxen - Paul is not denying God's concern for the fair treatment of animals but is simply showing if God cares that much about animals certainly he is even more concerned about the fair treatment of those who are caring for His church.

v.10 Plow In Hope - Paul now looks to the example of the farmer. Just as the farmer puts in long and hard hours in anticipation of an eventual benefit from his hard work so the servant of the church has a right to share in the eventual benefits that result in the lives of those he has served.

v.11 Reap Your Material - Paul points out that the spiritual investment a servant of Christ has put into the lives of God's people should result in certain material blessing. It would be only proper for him to share in some way with those material results. Personal spiritual growth, godly marriages and children, and wisdom from God's word for the daily issues of life will often provide a person with a life that results in many outward blessings.

v.12 If Others Are - The Corinthian believers were supporting financially others who had a far less claim to it than Paul.

Not Used This Right - Paul now makes his point that the reason he did not demand financial support was not based upon him not having the right. It was just the opposite. He had the right but chose not to use it.

Hinder the Gospel - It seems some in Corinth questioned Paul's motives as to whether he did what he did for money or out of true sincerity. Sadly, even though Paul made these personal sacrifices to try and soften the hearts of his hearers it only seemed to make matters worse. The fact is often those who are looking for fault in God's servants are only masking their own hearts that are looking for an excuse to not obey the teaching of God's word by that servant.

v.13 Do You Not Know - Here Paul refers to the ministry of the Levitical tribe of Israel that was called by God to tend to the needs of the tabernacle and then later the temple in Jerusalem. This included the priestly services of sacrifice at the altar and teaching; but as well as the maintenance of the temple, the preparation of incense and oil, the preparation of the grain and meat sacrifices, the singers and instrumentalists in the Temple of David, and including the accounting of the revenue.

Partake of - The Levites were supported by the offering brought to the God for worship.

v.14 Lord Has Commanded - Paul may be referring to Matthew 10:10 or Luke 10:8. However it is also possible there was a more direct word from Christ on this matter that had not been recorded in the gospels.

v.15 I Have Not - Paul makes it clear that he is not writing these various reasons that justify the support of God's servants with the motivation of seeking support.

Better For Me - Paul had found there to be many personal and ministerial advantages in not seeking the support of churches like the one at Corinth. As we have earlier said, Paul did receive financial support without any hesitation (II Cor. 11:8-9) but it was only from the people in churches who did so voluntarily out of love and obedience to Jesus Christ.

My Boasting - Paul believed that what brought eternal honor or reward to his servanthood was that he was not motivated by money or position but instead it was a motivation of love. It was the "love of Christ that constrained" him to preach the gospel (2 Cor. 5:14).

Woe Is Me - Paul reveals that simply because he is in the Lord's service cannot be cause for him to anticipate an eternal reward for his service. He believed he had no choice as to that. But what he did have power over was the motivation for his service. Was it personal gain or an act of love to God. Paul saw it as the most woeful thing that could ever befall him if he did not only preach the gospel, but did not do it from the right motivation.

v.17 Do This Willingly - One of the advantages Paul saw to the Corinthians not respecting his call as an apostle and not taking proper care of him financially was that it gave him an opportunity to test his heart.

A Stewardship - This is a servant who is entrusted with the wealth of the master to properly manage those resources to produce greater wealth. Paul saw himself in such a light as it related to his motivations in serving Christ.

v.18 My Reward - Paul considered it a much greater reward that would result in more souls coming to Christ if he would deny his right to financial support and thereby relieving the concerns his hearers had as to his motivation.

Without Charge - This still remains a wise principle. Believers and nonbelievers should have access to the teaching of the gospel.

Serving All Men v.19-23

v.19 Win The More - Paul knew he was free from the judgment of all men in regards to the issues he has been dealing with because it was not man but God he was ultimately responsible to. However, in the hopes of bringing more to Christ he willingly denied many of his personal rights.

v.20 As A Jew - Paul gladly showed a respect for and would share in those aspects of Jewish culture and law that would open a way to share the gospel with them (Acts 16:3, 18:18, 21:21-27, 23:1-6).

v.21 Without the Law - The Gentiles had not been given the law of Moses and therefore among the Gentiles Paul behaved in a way to respect their cultural sensitivities as long as it did not violate the law of Christ.

Law Toward Christ - Paul qualifies his statement in regards to living without the law lest some would take that as a license for sin. To live without the law here is clearly a reference to the ceremonial laws. Paul teaches elsewhere that the law of Christ is summed up by love (Gal. 5:14).

v.22 To The Weak - The weak here refers to those in Ch. 8:7-12 who felt it would be sinful to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols.

All Things - Paul shows his heart is open to all people and is therefore willing to give up his own rights and ways of doing things if it will create a pathway to someone Christ died for.

v.23 With You - Paul now applies what he has been teaching to his relationship with the Corinthians. His goal is to share together with them in the blessings of the gospel. That had been his desire in seeking to adapt to their weaknesses and doubts about his motives.

Do You Not Know - Paul says this rhetorically because he knew that most of his readers would be aware of the examples of running, boxing and wrestling that he is now going to use to finish his teaching on the need for self-denial for the benefit of others. These athletic events were well known because Corinth was the location of one of the four Greek games. They followed each other over a four year cycle. The Pythian games at Delphi, the Nemean games at Nemola of Cryolis, the Isthmian games at the Isthmus of Corinth and the Olympic games at Olympia.

Striving For A Crown (Verses 24-27)

v.24 Run In Such A Way - Paul calls upon the believers to live their Christian lives with the same intensity and passion as someone who runs in a race realizing only one person can win.

v.25 Temperate In All Things - This refers to a lifestyle of self control and discipline that is able to deny those things that may be "lawful" but will hinder in reaching the desired goal. Here the athlete is seen as a good example of how a servant of Christ should live. An athlete needs to deny certain foods, have a strict schedule of exercise, etc.

Perishable Crown - The crown here refers to the wreath given to the winner of his event. At the Delphi games it was an apple wreath, at the Isthmian games it was a pine wreath, at the Nemean games it was a parsley wreath and at the Olympic games it was an olive wreath.

Imperishable Crown - The believer is called upon to seek an unfading and eternal crown (I Tim 4:8; James 1:12; I Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10, 3:11, 4:4). Paul obviously hopes to show the glaring contrast between the final results of an athlete that lives a life of self-denial and the servant of Jesus Christ.

v.26 Not With Uncertainty - Paul makes clear that the success that is sought in self-denial must be coupled with a clear all-consuming purpose (Philippians 3:12-15).

Beats the Air - Paul sees the boxer who wins as guiding his blows to hit his opponent, not missing its mark or simply shadow boxing which never actually wins a match but appears very impressive. Paul did not want to use up his life's energy for nothing. He sought to live a life with a clear aim. Neither did he engage in fighting "shadows." He got into the real battles that were worth fighting rather than wasting his efforts on fighting self made men of straw.

v.27 Discipline - "Hupopeago" (Gk.) This word means literally "to hit under the eye." Paul realized that to fulfill his goal in winning the imperishable crown he had to keep his body from overriding the decisions he had made that at times were very difficult for him.

Subjection - This means to bring your bodily appetites into obedience rather than allowing your life to become a slave to the body.

Disqualified - Paul's great concern was that his life would end up being set aside by God as an unfruitful life because he was unwilling to embrace the needed aspects of personal self-denial that would make his life most effective in bringing people to Christ.