

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:1-12

Title: Some Questions for You

Truth: Paul's apostleship comes with certain rights.

Date/Location: Sunday August 23, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

Matthew 17:24-27 records an incident in which the Lord instructed Peter to pay a temple tax in order not to offend the tax collectors. As sons of the great King, neither the Lord (*the Son*) nor Peter (a son) were obligated to pay the tax. But not everyone possessed that clear-headed knowledge or recognition that the Lord and the disciples were so well-placed in divine society. They avoided unnecessary conflict by paying the tax. This is like what the apostle Paul will speak about in 1 Corinthians 9.

I. Paul is Definitely an Apostle, v. 1-2

A. The opening questions in verse 1 are clearly rhetorical. By means of the questions, Paul makes these assertions: He is an apostle. He *is* "free" in the sense that he has all the liberty that a Christian can have. He *has seen* the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Corinthians *are* a fruit of gospel work.

By making these statements in the form of questions, he invites the mind of the Corinthians to actively think through what he is saying. (Imagine a classroom in which the teacher asks questions of you at any time. Would that help you to pay better attention?) In the first 12 verses of the chapter, Paul asks 16 questions.¹

B. The last point—the Corinthians are spiritual fruit of Paul—is supported by the statement in verse 2. There, Paul suggests the possibility that others do not recognize him as an apostle of Christ. Even if that were true, that was irrelevant to the Corinthians. Paul came to them and preached the gospel, their eyes were opened, they were saved and transformed.

They saw that their prior way of life was wrong and they repented of it (or, most of them did). By all of this, they *knew* that Paul was the real deal—a true minister of the gospel. And he had done some miracles among them—this is not recorded in Acts 18 and early Acts 20 where Paul's visits to Corinth are recorded, but he mentions it in 2 Cor. 12:12. The believers themselves were in effect the "stamp of approval" (seal) on Paul's apostleship. If *he* were not an apostle and minister of God's grace, *they* would not exist as Christians and as a church.

¹ There are only three more questions in the chapter after v. 12: verses 13, 18 and 24. All Scripture is from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

C. That should settle the matter of Paul’s apostleship and his rights. But, it did not—on two counts.

1. **First**, someone had sown a seed of doubt in the church about Paul. Perhaps his apostleship was fake, they suggested. Maybe the fact that he did not take financial support from them caused them to be offended or to doubt his authenticity, since all itinerant speakers were looking for a handout (2 Cor. 12:13, 11:7-9).
2. **Second**, Paul explains that he did not use the full rights of his apostleship. He did this to gain a greater reward for his service (1 Cor. 9:18), by presenting the gospel free of charge. His free ministry was an illustration of the free-ness of the gospel. You do not pay to hear the message or to get saved!

II. Paul Has All the Rights of an Apostle, v. 3-12a

A. Some of the people in Corinth were examining Paul, investigating whether he really was an apostle and questioning whether he possessed the rights associated with an apostle. A “right” refers to something that is within your power or to do or obtain. It is something “due” to you.² For an apostle, these rights included:

1. Eat and drink. What he means is that he has the right to financial support so that he can eat and drink without having to work an outside job to pay for his needs. Working another job is sometimes necessary; sometimes it is done voluntarily; but it *always* comes with a downside for ministry. There is simply too much to do!
2. Take along a believing wife, like the other apostles, the brothers of Christ, and Peter. The idea is that as he travels, he should be able to take along his family with him without having to find other financial resources to pay their way. For a missionary, it would be impossible to minister without support for the entire family.

These rights continue for missionaries and pastors (elders/overseers) throughout the entire church age.

B. Paul inquires whether he and Barnabas are a “special case” who had no right to refrain from working. With that, he gives the “overall” right of

² We like to speak about *rights* today, like the right to life, to freedom of speech, to worship, to bear arms, etc. Some want to expand that list into other areas like healthcare and education and universal income and many others. We must be careful to limit our understanding of rights to what Scripture teaches.

which he speaks—that of not being required to do a side job to support one’s own Christian ministry.

- C. Paul then gives four compelling illustrations to prove the point that a minister of the gospel should receive financial or equivalent support for his ministry.
1. A **soldier** does not go to war at his own expense. Notice again the repeated rhetorical questions. They give the letter a tone of shock, like it does not make any sense that the Corinthians would be thinking like they are about such an obvious issue.
 2. A **farmer** who plants a vineyard enjoys the fruit of it. A mark of injustice is when the farmer’s own labors and property are seized so that he cannot live or prosper from his work.
 3. A **shepherd** who tends a flock of cattle or goats is given milk harvested from that flock.
 4. Even **oxen** are given the provision that they can eat something while treading out the grain. This is specified in the Law of Moses by God in Deut. 25:4. The apostle Paul makes an argument from lesser to greater to explain that if an animal can expect support, it is altogether reasonable for a man to expect it!

In every case, the worker earns his living from his work. Just like a day-laborer was to be paid at the end of his day (Deut. 24:15), so apostles were to be supported. Ministers of the gospel are like soldiers and farmers (2 Tim. 2:3-6) and shepherds (1 Peter 5:2). Pastors and evangelists are under orders from a commander (Christ). They plant and water the message of the word (1 Cor. 3:6-8). To **volunteer** to forego such compensation is possible but may be unwise depending on circumstances; to **demand** that ministers be unpaid runs against the clear teaching of the Bible.

- D. **Examples:** The first group of 12 disciples sent out by Christ were instructed not to take along with them extra supplies, “for the worker is worthy of his food” (Matthew 10:9-11, Mark 6:7-10, Luke 9:1-4).

The Lord instructed the group of 70 disciples in the same manner (Luke 10:1-8) because “the laborer is worthy of his wages.” While the disciples were not receiving “financial” support *per se*, they were receiving the equivalent to supply their basic needs of food and shelter for the relatively short time that they were serving the Lord on that special mission.

Paul himself was the recipient of such support time and again from churches and individuals. For example: Philippians 4:16.

He instructed the same not only in 1 Corinthians 9 (esp. v. 14) but also in 1 Timothy 5:17-18 and Gal. 6:6.

- E. Paul's final point is another lesser to greater argument. He has given the church something of extremely high value: spiritual truth, the good news of salvation, the announcement of the coming King. That being the case, then he reasons it is not a big deal if in return he earns some material things from them. Notice again how he says it in question number 15 in verse 11: "Is it a great thing if we reap your material things?" Nope.

We must pause to consider the truth that **spiritual things are of far higher value than material things**. For example, look at Matthew 16:24-27. There is no price that you can put on your soul. Without God sending you someone to give you spiritual truth, you would be spending an infinitely costly eternity in misery apart from God for your sin.

Or Luke 12:15-21: An abundance of possessions is no help your soul's condition. It is far better to savingly know God. Matthew 4:4 teaches us that God's word is the real basic element needed for life. In John 4:34 Jesus says that His food is to do the will of God. Romans 14:17 reminds us that God's kingdom is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit. Our priority should be God's righteousness and kingdom, and the material needs will follow (Matt 6:33). Our treasure and heart should be in heaven, not on earth (Matt. 6:20-21). Bodily exercise is of some profit, but the profit of godliness extends much farther (1 Tim. 4:8). Mark 10:29-30 teaches that anyone who leaves behind worldly possessions to serve Christ will receive far more blessing in the future.

Romans 15:25-27 teaches that those who benefit from someone's spiritual things are *obligated* to share material blessings with them.

We are trying to do the same here at FBC: give something of spiritual value. We teach spiritual truth from God's Word in every service. We freely give our Bible notes by publishing them on the website for anyone to use. We offer Biblical counsel to those who ask for it. Now we are live streaming services on Sundays and Wednesdays. Our reach is not huge, but that's up to the Lord.

III. Paul Does not Use Those Rights, v. 12b-...

We will pick up next time with this point.

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