

# 1st Corinthians 9

## Paul confirms his apostleship.

### Nine arguments proving Paul's apostleship.

1. His claim of being an apostle verse 1.
2. His claim to freedom from all secular and religious bondage enabling him to be completely devoted to the work of the Lord verse 1.
3. His claim to seeing Jesus verse 1.15; 8.
4. The existence of the Corinthian church and their conversion from heathenism verse 1-2
5. His consecration to abnormal living so as to preach the gospel verse 3-6.
6. His unselfish devotion to his calling without pay verse 7-15.
7. His divine obligation to fulfil call to his apostleship verse 16-18.
8. His devoted service to all men to win them to the gospel verse 19-23.
9. His qualifications for the apostleship and his Christian calling. verse 24-27.

### Verse 1

*Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus, are not you my work in the Lord?*

In the previous Chapter Paul instructed the Church not to put a stumbling block in the way of a fellow Christian by using his undoubted rights as an apostle so that he may win men for Christ. This included eating meats offered to idols at the feasts they attended. He told them not to do or go anywhere that may cause a fellow Christian to stumble in the faith and hinder his walk with God. This chapter begins with Paul having to re-assert his authority as an apostle. Not only did Paul meet opposition from those outside the church but now he was getting discouragement from within. His teaching also upset some in the church and those who became offended by it began to doubt Paul's apostleship, so Paul found it necessary to defend his authority and calling and he did that with assertion.

*Am I not an apostle? Am I not free?* Here Paul alludes to Chapter 8: verse 9 where he says '*this liberty of yours*' should not become a stumbling block for the weak we are free in Christ to do His will. We are not free to sin. It is apparent this liberty had got them thinking and believing they could criticise and doubt Paul's apostleship. He is saying if you have liberty so have I, if you are free so am I after all I have seen Jesus, and in His personal appearance to me I received my apostolic commission.

It was on the way to Damascus that Paul saw Jesus. He was surrounded by the men who were with him and who also saw the great light but did not hear the voice. Acts chapter 1: verse 2 confirms that it is the Lord who chose His apostles through the work of the Holy Spirit.

And Paul goes on to say '*Are you not my work in the Lord?*' Paul built the church by preaching the gospel to the heathen; they were all heathen men and women who knew not Jesus, and once introduced to Jesus they were brought into liberty free from the bondage of idol worship.

Paul talks of a seal of his apostleship in verse 2. A seal was a design made out of gold, or stone and made into a ring. It was this ring pressed into wax that put credence to a letter that was sent. The Greeks were excellent at this sort of engraving so the church knew what Paul was talking about.

### Verse 2

*If I be not an Apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you for the seal of Apostleship are you in the Lord.*

Other apostles were preaching in other churches and they were generally recognised by their congregations as apostles. The Church at Corinth should have recognised the seal that God had given them: i.e. the evidence of Paul's apostleship and calling in the Lord. The best manuscripts read 'you are my work in the Lord'. (Eph. 2:10). If the Lord had not sent Paul to Corinth he would not have started and taught the church there. Paul was talking to a small section of the church who were in rebellion, most of the church were true believers, so he offers the success of his ministry to the doubters as proof of his apostleship.

#### Verse 3/4/5.

*My answer to them who do examine me is this, have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? (Peter)*

Have we not the power or the right to eat and drink at the expense of the church we have founded. Paul explains to the Church at Corinth that he has the same right to be married as Peter, James and Jude who were married.

Verse 5 tells us that there were other brethren who were also married and is therefore decisive proof against celibacy of the clergy. It also shows that the subsequent papal doctrine of having holy women minister to the needs of celibate ministers to be false. Believing this doctrine would have produced great scandal and added to the congregation's problems.

#### Verse 7

*Who goes to war any time at his own expense, or who plants a vineyard and will not eat of the fruit, or who feeds a flock and not eat of the milk of the flock?*

Paul is establishing that as a minister of the gospel he could have required the church to feed him and financially support him while he was visiting them. Paul and Barnabas were tentmakers and were able to support themselves but going out to work limited the time they were spending on the church work.

These questions point out the common sense of man joining with God's provision showing the principle of every man living by the fruits of his labour. And Paul asks the church the question are we the only apostles that have no right to be supported by the church?

#### **There are 4 principles here.**

1. Barnabas adopted Paul's method of supporting himself Acts 4: 36-37.
2. Apostles in general were supported by the church not secular labour.
3. Paul and Barnabas had a trade by which they could support themselves, they were tent makers.
4. They chose to support themselves in certain places so as not to hinder the founding of a church.

#### Verse 9

A quote from Deut. 25: 4 says 'Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treads out the corn. Does God take care of oxen?'

This question asked is 'will God take care of the ox and not be mindful of the welfare of man?'

#### Verse 11

*If we have sown unto you spiritual things is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?*

Paul says 'If we have been the means of bringing you to the cross and the point of salvation through Jesus Christ is it too much to ask for temporal support when we give ourselves completely to this work?'

#### Verse 12

*If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.*

If others who serve you in any way have a right to a recompense for that service, surely we who have served you in the most important issue of your eternal welfare have a right to be supported by you. In this chapter Paul strongly asserts his rights in this matter; but he is equally strong in saying that he refuses to avail himself of this right that he may influence a wider circle of men. Paul thought it better to forgo his undoubted rights so as to win for Jesus those who were his jealous critics who were watching his every move seeking to find fault.

Remember Paul's comment in Chapter 6: 12 *'all things are Lawful unto me but all things are not expedient, all things are Lawful unto me but I will not be brought under the power of any'*. Paul did not want to do anything or go anywhere that may cause another to stumble and loose his soul. May we all live such dedicated lives with our fellow brother and sister in mind?

#### Verse 13

*Do you not know that they which minister about Holy things live off the things of the Temple, and they which wait at the Altar are partakers with the Altar?*

This refers to the Old Testament days when those Priests that minister Holy things in the Temple were fed with certain portions of Sacrifices. (Numbers 18:8-13; Deut. 18:1). The others were maintained by the tithes, firstfruits and offerings made to the Temple.

#### Verse 14

*Even so has the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live by the gospel.*

It should be obvious that those who minister spiritual things should be supported by those to whom they minister.

#### Verse 15

*But I have used none of these things neither have I written these things that it should be so done unto me.*

Paul is referring to Matt. 10:10 and Luke 10: 7. In both cases it is the preacher of whom he is speaking and even now he has not written to the church to claim any expense or gift although he might plead the authority of God in law to do so. He says he would rather die than put the church under bondage to pay him.

We can see the carnal attitude that this church has toward spiritual things. Right from Chapter 1, we have noticed the lack of love and grace given to one another. And now it is apparent that they are quite jealous toward Paul.

#### Verse 16

*For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of for necessary is laid upon me yes, woe unto me if I preach not the gospel.*

Paul felt that he has nothing of himself to boast about and to preach the gospel was not a choice on his part but a command from the Lord which he does willingly and without charge.

#### Verse 17

*For if I do this thing willingly I have a reward (from the Lord) but if against my will a dispensation of the Gospel is committed unto me.*

Paul refers to the Parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16. 1-3. the story goes like this. A Steward had charge of all leases of the tenants and all contracts with the debtors. Some let each debtor make a new agreement to benefit the debtor and himself so that he would gain favour. He would show this new agreement to his master in the hope that the exaggerated sums would not be noticed thus the debtors would be obliged to support the Steward with favours. Evidently this was a practice that was common place.

So Paul was explaining to the church at Corinth that if he was a willing co-worker with God, he would have his reward which was an incorruptible crown. (v25). If a preacher were to preach the gospel freely without being a burden to anyone he would have a special reward. If I do charge when I preach the gospel I simply fulfil an office of a Steward and although I claim my privileges at the same time I lose that special reward due to me by preaching the gospel without charge. We must share the Gospel in no other way than we give it our very best otherwise we lose our reward.

#### Verse 18

*What is my reward then? Verily that when I preach the gospel I may make the Gospel of Jesus Christ without charge that I not abuse my power in the Gospel.*

A price cannot be put on the Gospel and preachers should not exploit the people they preach to but rather they are called to edify them.

#### Verse 19

*For though I am free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.*

Christ is our Lord and Master not man, even so Paul voluntarily submitted himself to the work of the gospel the way Christ did at the cross. Although Paul had no obligation to any man he acted as a slave to them all.

#### Verse 20

*And unto the Jews I became a Jew that I might gain the Jews; to them who are under the Law as under the Law that I might gain them who are under the Law.*

Paul explains that when he preached to the Jews he ‘became’ a Jew. He adopted a stance that would appeal to their mindset without compromising the principles of the gospel he was preaching. Being a Jew himself he was able to understand the mind of the Jew, all that he might win them for Christ. Those who are under the Law refer to those who still, even after they had embraced the gospel continued to observed certain Jewish religious rights and ceremonies.

Paul was well trained and taught in things pertaining to the Law so again he was able to converse with the Legal profession on the same level, again that he may win them for Christ. Several manuscripts added ‘not being myself under the Law’ which again shows us that Paul had found freedom in Christ that we too can enjoy.

#### Verse 21

*To them who are without Law, being not without Law to God but under the Law to Christ, that I might gain them who are without Law.*

‘To them who are without Law’ refers to the Gentiles who had no written Law, but had Law written in their hearts Romans 2: 15. Most manuscripts read ‘the Law of God’ and ‘the Law of Christ’ which makes better sense. Today we have the Law of God and of Jesus Christ written in the Bible and the Christian also has that Law in his heart by which he lives.

#### Verse 22

*To the weak became I weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some.*

The reader would do well to read Romans 14.1-15 where the Lord tells us that doubtful practices should not be judged by us, there are a number of practices that any one of us could judge others by but verse 13 says ... *but judge this rather that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.*

This seems to be more important to the Lord than many of the petty rules and nonessentials we place upon ourselves and on others. Each man shall stand before the judgement seat of Christ to give account of

himself before God. Verse 3 says *'for God has received him'* and verse 4 says *'who are you who judges God's servant (Greek)*

### Verse 23

*And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be a partaker thereof with you.*

The gospel of Jesus Christ and the message of the cross are the only means of salvation and eternal life. Therefore Paul thought it vital that the gospel was known about before anything else. Once a person is a Christian and has begun to follow the Lord it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin, righteousness and judgement: it is not ours. The gospel includes the message of sin and the need for repentance. This was the characteristic of the gospel preached by Peter on the Day of Pentecost when the hearts were 'undone' and cried out what must we do to be saved. And the simple answer: repent, be baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit.

### Verse 24

*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receives the prize, run that you may obtain.*

Paul likens the Christian life as a runner who trains his body eats the proper food and will not abuse his body. He shows us 4 things that one must do to be saved;

1. Be as earnest to make heaven as men are to win a race. (v25)
2. Be temperate in all things. (v25)
3. Fight with absolute confidence of winning (v 26)
4. Bring your body under control and subjection (v27)

We must be convinced that God loves us and accept that He died on the Cross in our place. We must be committed to the path we have chosen and follow the Lord by way of prayer, Bible reading and fellowship with other likeminded Christians.

We must be temperate in all things; the parallel is the months of training and hardship before a contest of running or fighting with an opponent.

A fighter fights with absolute confidence that he is going to win. Should he give his opponent the slightest thought that he is weak, frightened or not fit for the fight he has lost! In verse 27 Paul claims he is running the Christian race to win and fight the fight with a knockout blow to the enemy.

### Verse 25

*And every man that strives for mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

We all know the length to which an athlete goes to become fit to even enter the race, let alone run in it. Paul is using the Pythian Games to illustrate the Christian walk. He explains the winner of the games was given a corruptible crown made of laurel branches. For the Nemean games they used parsley and pine was used for the Isthmian games. All these crowns were corruptible and began to wither as soon as they were made. What a contrast to the incorruptible crown given to those in Christ.

### Verse 26

*I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air.*

Paul explains that there is an uncertainty among the contestants as to who the winner of the race would be. They all trained hard, all ate properly, strived to be fit but they had to compete against each other and the winner was unknown. For the Christians it was very different: so long as each ran the race as he ought each would receive the prize. Pugilists were said to beat the air when contending with a nimble adversary. By running from side to side, stooping, and including various contortions of the body, eluded to blows of his opponent who beating the air, not hitting the target but tiring himself out. A boxer will do much the same thing. We are exhorted to run the good fight of faith which is anchored firmly in the Cross of Christ but many Christians today are beating the air for lack of training and discipleship.

Verse 27

*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have Preached to others I myself should be a castaway.*

The body, Paul refers to is the flesh and he says he must keep the body under control. Unless the soul and the spirit keep the body under control the body will control the spirit and our soul. Paul considers himself a combatant as he still refers to the games but also refers to the preaching of the gospel. A preacher of salvation may yet miss the mark of the high calling which is in Christ Jesus he may show others the way of eternal life and never get there himself, and end up a castaway. Paul warns that it is possible to be rejected by the Great Judge even after his preaching and leading others to acceptance of the Lord. A holy fear of himself was necessary to preserve the fidelity of an Apostle, so we must run this race with our bodies under subjection to the Spirit of God that we may obtain a crown of righteousness.

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