LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 9 :1-18

Not demanding my rights

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Hi, everybody. We're back with our continuing study in 1 Corinthians. We're moving on to chapter 9, and this is going to be a two-parter for this chapter. We're going to take the first 18 verses of the chapter here as we begin, and we're going to see how the Apostle Paul is continuing on with the discussion that we dealt with in the last study, as we went through chapter 8, about laying down our rights. And just so we can kind of make sure we're connected in with what he's saying, I want to read the very last verse of chapter 8 as kind of a way of setting the stage for what we're going to be dealing with here in the first part of 9.

And the last verse, which is verse 13 of chapter 8, says, Therefore, if food makes my brothers stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brothers stumble. And of course, the Apostle Paul is saying very clearly in that verse, I am going to be willing at any time to lay down my rights for the sake of my brother. He was talking specifically about eating meat sacrificed to idols. We went through that in the last chapter. We don't need to explain what that was all about.

But this is now going to create a bit of a springboard for the Apostle Paul as he goes on to talk about another area where he has been willing to lay down his rights. And it's going to encompass this area of receiving support from the Corinthians. And so we're going to read through the first 18 verses, and then we'll pray, and then we'll get into this. All right? Chapter 9, verse 1.

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? 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.

This is my defense to those who would examine me. 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 the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?

Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Lord say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.

Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel, 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. 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, 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 a stewardship. What 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. That's where we're going to dig in for this part of chapter nine. Let's open it up in prayer.

Father, as we get into these verses, as we talk about these first 18 verses of chapter nine, I just pray that your Holy Spirit would lead us, that you would guide us, and that you would minister grace among us, that we might hear your voice and respond to it. We ask it, Lord, in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. I think you can already see what the Apostle Paul is doing in these verses, especially when he starts off by saying, am I not free? Am I not free to have rights, to enjoy certain things? Am I not an apostle?

Have I not seen Jesus, our Lord, and so forth? He begins to kind of talk about the fact that with his apostleship, there come certain rights, certain privileges, certain things that he says, I can enjoy. I have the right. I have the freedom to enjoy. He says, you know, don't we have the right to eat and drink whatever we want?

These are all rhetorical questions, and by the way, the answer is always assumed to be yes to all of these. He says, don't we have the right to take along a believing wife? Now Paul wasn't married, but we know that others were, like Peter and so forth, and he says, you know, when we go around and travel to

the various churches, don't we have the right to take a wife with us? Sure we do. Don't we have the right to refrain from working for a living?

All right, now he's going to get into this whole support issue. You need to know, if you don't already, that it was the Apostle Paul's way of doing things to go to a new area and not to insist on any kind of support. Back in this day and age, traveling preachers and teachers were very common, very common, and when they would travel to a new area, they would take up this right of support. They would ask to stay in someone's home or to be taken care of, to be fed, you know. This was a very common sort of a thing, but the Apostle Paul did things differently.

When he came into a new area, he would, first of all, get a job. We know that he was a tent maker by trade, and so he would go and seek out the local tent maker and get hired to help out and so forth, and in that way he would work during the day, and then he would preach and teach during the evening or off hours, and he would do that in an area until he was ready to move on. Now, some of the other churches that he had started and gotten going would then often send him support, money, and when that happened, he was able to back away from his tent making and devote himself to full-time ministry, but he had a particular way of doing things that he would never ask for support from brand new believers. He didn't want money to become a stumbling block. He had a right for this support, but he didn't want them to think that money was the reason he was doing what he was doing.

I think there were plenty of guys going around back then for whom they probably could have said, yeah, I think it's all about money for him. Paul just simply did not want anything to get in the way of people hearing the gospel, and so he begins to ask a question. This is interesting. In verse 7, he says, who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Can you imagine somebody going into the army and paying his own way, his own meals, buying his own clothes, and so forth?

Who plants a vineyard without eating some of the fruit, right? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Obviously, if you're farming, whether you're planting crops or raising animals... animals, you expect to benefit from all that work. And then he says, am I just saying this from my own perspective or from my own sense of what I think is right?

That's what he asks in verse 8. He says, no, this is even written down in the law of Moses. And then he quotes Deuteronomy, where the Lord, through Moses, said, you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain. They would hook up oxen to these huge grinding mills where they would throw grain in there. And they had these big stones that would grind it.

But they would hook up oxen and have them pull in a circle and so grind the grain. But he said, don't put a muzzle on the ox when he's doing that, because he's working for you. And then he asked the question, was this all about oxen? Was God just simply caring about oxen when he gave that command? And then he goes on in verse 10 to ask, does he not certainly speak for our sake?

And then he answers the question. Yeah, it was for our sake that he said this. And then he asks this, if we have sown spiritual things among you, in other words, if we've spent time planting the word of God in your hearts, in your lives, in your community, and so forth, don't we then have a right to reap some material blessings from you? And if others share this rightful claim, don't we even have more right to do it? All right, so this is interesting.

Paul's going to go on, as we know here. And he's going to talk about the fact that he didn't take advantage of that right, because he didn't want anything to hinder the gospel. But there is a principle here that he's laying down, which is important for us to see. And that is, there is a right that preachers, teachers, pastors have to receive support from the people to whom they are ministering. Now, if a pastor chooses to forego that right, that's his business.

That's exactly what Paul did. But if a pastor chooses to receive the right of support, that's not a problem either, because you don't muzzle the ox while he's treading out the grain. That's the principle that God gave in the Old Testament that applies here in the New. Now, Paul goes on, after saying in verse 12, if others share this claim, and it is right to share, have that claim, do we not even more? He says, nevertheless, we have not made use of this right.

But we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Paul knew that money is an issue. And you know, it's funny. Money is still an issue. It's still a problem.

You still hear people saying, I tried going to church for a while, but all they talked about was money. And it just really turned me off. And I just, I'm not going anymore. Well, you know what? I agree with that person.

Some people can use it as an excuse. I get that. But I'll tell you something, and this comes as a pastor. We talk way too much in church about money. We talk way too much about people giving money to the church.

You know, I pastored Calvary Chapel in Ontario, Oregon for 35 years. And in that 35 years, we made a decision. We were never, ever going to ask for money. And we were never even going to talk about money unless it came up in the scripture. And it does come up in the scripture, such as right here.

And it's fine. You know, you're teaching through the Bible. You've got to deal with what the Bible says. But we made a decision. Not only were we never going to talk about money, we were never going to take an offering.

So what we did is we put just offering boxes kind of scattered around in a couple of places in our auditorium. And we just left it to people to either give or not. If they so choose. And it was their decision, you know, to do it or not. It was not, we didn't do this because we didn't have the right to talk about money or even to ask for money.

We do have a right. The question is, is it getting in the way of the gospel? Is it actually becoming a problem? We decided we didn't want it to be a problem in the church that I pastored. So we never talked about it.

We never asked. We never took an offering. We never passed a plate. Never. Not in 35 years.

By the way, can I just tell you, the Lord blessed us so much that we were overflowing in the area of funds, finances. And we never once asked for anything. So I not only think that it's a good thing to be careful. And you know, if any pastors are listening and following along with this study, can I just challenge you? Stop talking about money unless it comes up in the Bible.

Don't even address it. Don't talk about it. Listen, if you have financial needs, and every church does. I mean, you got to pay to keep the lights on. You got to pay to heat and condition the air.

You got to buy things. There are costs. It's costly to have a church building and all the other things go along with it. And if you have needs, and you're going to have needs, tell the Lord. Don't tell the people.

Don't harangue the people. Tell God. He knows your needs, and He is able to provide for them. Make up your mind to talk to God about your financial needs, not the people. That's a challenge.

And here's the reason. It's not because you don't have a right. You do have a right. But it's so that nothing will hinder the gospel. Don't turn people off by talking about money.

Let's keep going. Verse 13. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple? And by the way, that's not only in Judaism, but in pagan temples. The same was true.

And he says, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings. They get some of the food, some of the meat, to take care of their families. In the same way, listen to this. The Lord commanded

that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. In other words, from the people that they're talking to, that they're ministering to, the people they're pastoring.

God hasn't just suggested it. He has commanded it. You got to admit, verse 14 is a strong word. Commanded, right? God has commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should receive their living from doing that.

OK? Now, again, if any man or woman, for that matter, who is just sharing the gospel, decides to forego that right, that's their choice. He says in verse 15, but I have made no use of any of these rights. I have them, but I haven't made use of them, nor am I writing these to secure any such provision. He says, and I'm not writing you here so as to play upon your sympathies.

So you'll send me money. I'm not doing that. I love this next statement. I'd rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. Paul's not just boasting that he's able to proclaim the gospel without receiving support.

His boast is that the Lord takes care of me. And that's the boast that I had as a pastor for 35 years at Calvary Chapel, Ontario. I was able to boast that in 35 years, the church was not only able to take care of me and my family, even though we never asked for money, but we were able to pay for all of our needs, all our bills. We were able to build new structures on our property without asking for any money. We were able to hire a staff, children's ministry director, audio-visual technician, office staff, an assistant pastor, maintenance people.

We were able to hire those staff positions and pay them, and no one ever missed a paycheck. We never were ever late on any of our bills. We took care of all of our needs, and we had money left. That's my boast. But it's not me boasting, it's boasting in the Lord.

It's boasting in His faithfulness, right? That's what Paul's saying. I would rather die than have someone deprive me of this boast that God is good and He is able to provide according to the purpose of His will. 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.

What Paul is saying here is, I can't boast in what I do because it was God's calling. I mean, God simply, and you'll remember in Paul's case, God literally knocked him to the ground in this flash of light. Jesus spoke to him and told him that he was called to take the gospel to the Gentiles. So he says, there's nothing I can boast concerning what I'm doing because, woe to me if I don't do it, I have to do it. It's the calling, and not just my calling, it's my passion.

It's my passion. I believe that passion goes along with calling, I really do. And so people ask me all the time, how do I know what my calling is? And I usually ask them, well, what are you passionate about? What has God made you passionate about?

Are you passionate about sharing the gospel? Maybe that's your calling, to be an evangelist. Are you passionate about teaching the Bible? Chapter by chapter, verse by verse, maybe God's called you to be a teacher. Are you passionate about reaching children?

Are you passionate about helping people out who are in difficult times? Maybe you have a calling of compassion and giving. It goes on and on, but it usually connects with your passion. What are you passionate about, right? Verse 17, for if I do this of my own will, meaning this is what I thought I should do, then I guess I have a reward.

But if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. Whatever calling you have received, you've been given a stewardship of that calling. You can be faithful with that stewardship, or you can be unfaithful. The choice is up to you. Verse 18, and this is the last verse we're looking at.

What then is my reward? Well, 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. Paul said, that's my reward. That's the best reward that I could ever get, is that I can do this for free. Not charge anybody anything, because the ministry isn't for sale.

The gospel isn't for sale. The gospel we give freely. We received freely, we give freely, right? This was Paul's heart, and he said, I would rather die than to be taken away from this ability to boast that the Lord is faithful. These are great verses.

I just love these verses, because in the last chapter, Paul was exhorting the people of Corinth to lay down their rights. He made a claim. He said, if my brother has a problem with me eating meat, well, I won't eat meat. But that was kind of theoretical. So what Paul is doing in this first part of chapter nine, is he's giving them an example of an area where he was willing to lay down his right, and that was in receiving support.

And he said, this is my boast, this is my reward, is to do it for free. So what are you doing for free? What right are you laying down for the sake of others, that nothing would hinder the gospel of Jesus? Let's pray. Father, good stuff here in the first part of chapter nine.

Thank you, Lord, for the reminders that we are called to be stewards of whatever gifting and ability you've given to us, to be faithful and to give it away for free. Lord, you have loved us and saved us, and it

was free for us. And now may we turn around and give it away for free to others, even if it means surrendering our rights. Thank you for these reminders. Show us, Lord, how to apply them day by day.

We look to you in this, in the authority that is ours, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen.