

As we read this passage, it appears that the Apostle Paul has been forced to defend himself against some in the church who do not like him. They wanted the church to turn to Cephas or Apollos as their apostle and just forget about Paul and his years teaching them. Maybe they didn't like his style, his appearance, or even some of the things he taught, and so they criticized the fact that he did not receive financial support but worked to support himself. When you don't like someone, finding points of criticism real or imaginary come easily.

The Bible is about God and His relationship with us and our condition, and it spells it out in very down to earth terms. It is mostly about the problems we face due to our sinful nature and how God is the answer to them all. While God is transcendent, He is also with us in the midst of our struggles with very practical solutions. Church splits are one of those self-inflicted tragedies we face. This letter is an attempt by Paul to keep the church of Corinth united. If because of personal preferences they were able to nullify Paul's influence, they would probably do the same with the next apostle and the next, destroying the church in the process (Proverbs 27:20ⁱ).

Everyone prefers their own style. Some like flamboyant loud preaching. Others like a well-studied delivery of a text. Others want someone who appears impressive and tells good jokes. And so, criticism of pastors is common even when they are giving their all. That is not to say there are some who deserve to be criticized for taking advantage of being their own boss and selfishly misusing their time.

Every pastor is open to criticism of personal preference on a weekly basis. They are on call 24/7. They share the deepest hurts and pains of their parishioners. They are expected to teach and preach an inspiring and challenging message without making mistakes every week, and oversee all the affairs of the church, physical and spiritual. Their life is always scrutinized as well as the lives of their children. I experience that firsthand growing up as a pastor's son. It is a pressure that causes fifty percent of pastors to quit or go to another church within five years of their first place of ministry.

This passage is Paul's defense that he has not only given up his freedoms as a Christian but also his rights as an apostle so that the message would not be hindered. But first he must make the case for support of full-time ministers to be supported, lest they think all ministers should do as he had done (1 Timothy 5:17ⁱⁱ).

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? ² 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. 1 Corinthians 9:1,2 Paul asks these four questions with the expectation that people knew they are true. Why can't he choose to be self-supporting? Don't his miracles and their salvation affirm his apostleship? One of the qualifications for being an apostle was having seen the risen Lord whom Paul encountered on the road to Damascus (Acts 1:22ⁱⁱⁱ; 22:14^{iv}). Paul was the one who planted this church. Almost everyone in the church came to Christ through Paul's preaching the gospel or from those he had won to the Lord. He declares that fact is the seal of his apostleship. In other words, that they came to faith in Christ through his ministry proves he was God's official messenger to them.

The Corinthian's debate about who was a better leader probably pointed to some minor differences in teaching style and personal preferences (2 Corinthians 10:10^v).

However, it was Paul who introduced them to Jesus. The other leaders were just coming along behind him and helping them to mature. Some people today want to present themselves as apostles and attempt to exert authority over the elders of a local church when they had nothing to do with leading that flock of believers to the Lord. They want to take credit for what God has done through others for their own glory. Paul is exerting his authority by reminding them of the role God gave him. He is pointing out that God's assignment of him as their apostle was a choice they were trying to overturn.

³This is my defense to those who would examine me. ⁴Do we not have the right to eat and drink? ⁵Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? 1 Corinthians 9:3-6 It is not clear if verse three applies to verse two or the following verses? If verse two, then Paul is saying the fact that there is a Corinthian church is the defense against their accusations. If they deny he is an apostle, they deny their existence as a church. If it applies to the following verses, then his defense is that other teachers sought the support for themselves and their wives from the church, while Paul, and his fellow minister Barnabas worked to support themselves when in the church of Corinth. The teaching minister had a right to be supported financially by the church, but Paul gave up that right so they would realize the sincerity of his efforts.

The use of legal defense terms in this passage suggest that Paul felt as if the church of Corinth had made a general accusation against him for not accepting financial support. He speaks of it in terms of having a script that a person or group has written for expected behavior. Itinerant preachers had a right to financial support. Paul didn't fit their script so there must be something wrong.

Corinthians took pride in how much they paid to be tutored by someone. The higher the cost, the more valued his teaching must be. It is similar to someone who might complain about the cost of his child's tuition at Harvard, which is really a boasting in disguise. Those who were seeking to find fault with Paul took offense in his insistence on supporting himself.

The history of many churches teaches us that those who financially support the church often feel the pastor is obligated to hear their preferences and carry out their suggestions. I remember one pastor friend in town received a list from a wealthy parishioner of things he should preach on and topics he should avoid, as if the man was the voice of the Holy Spirit. Paul knew he had the right to receive support, but in this particular city, he wanted to avoid that complication and any appearance of preaching with finances as his motivation. Instead, he set an example for all lay people who work to support themselves and still advance the kingdom of God. This allowed him to be free of any unhealthy influence from big donors and avoid any accusation of preaching for financial gain (Acts 20:35^{vi}; James 2:1-4^{vii}).

There is an interesting phrase in verse 5 which gives us a bit of information we find nowhere else. Jesus' half-brothers also traveled around the churches preaching. We know His brother James did (James 1:19^{viii}), but this is plural, which means at least one other brother did as well. This tells us that after the resurrection, those who lived with Jesus from His youth realized He was the Lord. I can imagine people wanted to hear stories of Jesus in His youth. They probably confessed how they teased Him with, "Mama has always loved you best." Or how they disliked Jesus because Mary often said,

“Why can’t you be like your brother Jesus!” No wonder they didn’t want to believe in Him before the resurrection!

⁷ 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? 1

Corinthians 9:7 If anyone should have been supported, it was Paul! He uses several parallels in the natural world and Scripture to illustrate his case. He is saying that he agrees with them that he has the right to be supported. He is a soldier of the Lord and soldiers receive a salary (2 Timothy 2:3,4^{ix}). He is a farmer of God’s field, and farmers enjoy the produce from the field (2 Timothy 2:6^x). He is a shepherd of the flock, and shepherds were nourished by milk from the ewes (1 Timothy 5:2^{xi}).

⁸ Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? ⁹ 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? ¹⁰ 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. 1

Corinthians 9:8-10 Paul uses the Scripture to prove his point. He is inspired to use the verse about oxen from the Law. The Laws of Moses forbid the ox to be muzzled so that it could eat the grain it was treading out (Deuteronomy 25:4^{xii}). If you just forced the ox to work without feeding it, it will eventually be of no use to you. Even animals should be rewarded for their labor.

Paul then gives us a useful tool of interpretation. It is not only for the sake of the animal that the Scripture says this. It is a divine principle. If animals should, then certainly people should as well. The laborer should be rewarded with the fruit of his labor. The farmer works in hope of a future crop. He doesn’t plow, plant, weed, and water just to give to give it all away. He expects to partake of the harvest. And if someone threshes the grain for the farmer, he too should receive just compensation (Leviticus 19:13^{xiii}).

¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? ^{12a} If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? 1

Corinthians 9:11,12a The one who ministers spiritual things should be supported with their physical needs. This is another greater to the lesser argument. The spiritual was supplied by Paul so the least they could do was supply his physical needs. The church should respect his authority over the teacher who is just passing through.

People are often critical, and the enemy will use anything to keep people from believing. Some people in the church were upset that he doesn't accept support, but if he did accept it there are those who would not listen thinking he was doing it for the money. Or what he may have been alluding to is that the supporters would want him to dilute the gospel. It is one of those decisions that you know will be judged harshly no matter which you choose. Paul chose the one that would be most beneficial to the flock.

Too often, pastors are underpaid. After all, they only work on Sunday, right? And even then, it is a half day. I am grateful that is not the case here, and generally it is less true today than it was in the past. But still, in many small churches there is a church boss, the one who gives the most money and keeps the church going. That person will offer a parsonage and a very small salary, barely enough to get by. And if the church should grow, he will usually fire the pastor and look for someone else so that he maintains control. I have seen it happen too many times. When I came to Wayside, the search committee asked me what was the minimum I could get by on. They were pleased with

the figure I gave them. My first year's salary was a few thousand less than that minimum figure I requested. They allowed me to teach at a Christian School to make up the difference. Talking to other pastors I found that was not unusual. But if we know we are where God called us, we know God will provide our needs. On the other hand, there was a respected pastor in Texas who was given a new Mercedes every Christmas as a bonus. Churches can go to either extreme, undervaluing or idolizing their preaching pastor. The rule of thumb should be that the preaching pastor who serves full-time should receive the average income of those who attend. Then he can more readily relate to their condition and need.

There are some preachers who fleece the flock. They promise blessing if the congregation will give to the Lord, and they are the Lord's servant so you can just write the check to them. They will gladly prophesy a blessing over you for that gift. It is manipulating our own carnal spirit of greed. They usually don't stay for long, for when the blessing never appears, they are found to be frauds. I witnessed this when I visited a charismatic church in the Verde Valley. All the prophetic words of abundance never materialized for that church or the congregants.

^{12b} 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. 1 Corinthians 9:12b While Paul has made a strong defense for supporting those who preach and teach, he did not make use of that right. He was willing to endure anything rather than to put an obstacle in the way of the gospel. We have already seen in the verse before this chapter that he was willing never to eat meat again if it was going to stumble someone (1 Corinthians 8:13^{xiv}). Now he is saying he will preach in the day and evening and work in the afternoon when everyone else is resting just to be sure that finances don't get in the way of the gospel. He says in this verse that he is willing endure anything to be sure the gospel message comes through clearly. May God grant all pastors such a heart for the church, and may all of us have such a heart for others to be able to hear the gospel.

This set him apart from the other teachers in Corinth. It sets him apart from most preachers today. Some do endure a lot that they shouldn't have to, but for the sake of the gospel, for their great love for Jesus and the message they will. Others go when things get tough or when they don't get what they want. Jesus called them hirelings (John 10:12,13^{xv}). They flee when they see the wolf is coming.

Consider the tenacity of Paul. He would work harder than anyone. He constantly had the concern for the churches on his heart (2 Corinthians 11:28^{xvi}). Everywhere he went, the Judaizers opposed and persecuted him. He was stoned and left for dead. He was beaten with rods, and on and on (2 Corinthians 11:23-27^{xvii}). But he endured. Imprisoned he wrote letters to the churches and proclaimed the gospel to the rulers and judges. He was unstoppable (Philippians 3:14^{xviii}). He followed the example of His Lord and moved at His direction. His life was not his own, for he declared it was the life of Christ in him (Galatians 2:20^{xix}).

Would you like to have that same zeal and passion? We aren't all called to such a demanding life, but I believe we are all called to have the same kind of love for others. He was a demonstration of Jesus' teaching that he who is forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47^{xx}). Do you know how much you have been forgiven? You may not have killed Christians like Paul did, but remember Jesus said that if there is anger in your heart you will be liable to judgment (Matthew 5:22^{xxi}). And you know the way Jesus defined

adultery as merely looking on a woman with lust in your heart (Matthew 5:28^{xxii}). One of the things we tend to overlook when we read the Gospels is how Jesus showed us the depravity of our own hearts. We would rather not see that. But the wonderful thing is that when we see it, we realize how much we are forgiven, and it makes us love Him even more (1 John 4:19^{xxiii}).

¹³ 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? 1 Corinthians 9:13 Next, Paul uses the O.T. parallel to the preacher of the New Testament. We are not mediators between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5^{xxiv}), but we proclaim His message as the priests also did. The priests who serve in the temple are supported by the offerings (Numbers 5:9,10^{xxv}). In the same way, those who serve the congregation by preaching and teaching are supported by the offerings.

¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. 1 Corinthians 9:14 Evangelists, pastors and teachers, and missionaries should be financially supported by the church. Jesus said as much. Paul might be referring to Matthew 10:10,11^{xxvi}. They should never abuse their role by slacking off and giving less than their all. That would be to cheat the Lord who is supporting them through His body. They should give of themselves to those to whom they minister just as Jesus did and as we see in this passage that Paul did (John 15:12^{xxvii}).

¹⁵ 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. 1 Corinthians 9:15 He is not writing to convince them to support him. He is sharing his heart for ministry. He is emphasizing that he has chosen to give up that right so that they might hear the gospel undiluted by any sponsor's influence. He is declaring his self-support was to pre-empt those who would accuse him of financial motives. He is also doing it for a heavenly reward, not an earthly one (Matthew 6:19,20^{xxviii}). He would rather die than be forced to accept an income. That is how zealous he was to be sure that nothing could be used against him that would undermine the message of the gospel. He could boast in that zeal. But he would never boast in the fact that he proclaimed the gospel for he believed he was under obligation to God to do so. To deliver the message was his duty. How he did so, demonstrated his love for God and the Corinthians.

While the emphasis on this passage is the need to support those in ministry and Paul's freedom to be self-supporting, we can see in this passage his love for the Lord and his willingness to be spent for the sake of the gospel and the well-being of the churches. His heart was undivided (Psalm 86:11^{xxix}). **He exemplified what he taught in the last chapter, to be willing to give up our rights so as not to stumble a weaker believer.** He had to press his case to see that the church stayed united and continued to grow in Christ and to avoid letting personal preferences hinder their growth in Christ. What zeal he had for Lord and His body, the church! May our passion for the same increase in us!

Questions: 1 What problem is this chapter addressing? 2 What are the issues expressed in verses 1 and 2? 3 What rights that others took did Paul set aside? 4 What illustrations did he give for being supported? 5 What Scripture did he refer to? 6 What is the greater to lesser argument in verse 11? 7 What is the best way to consider the amount of support a pastor needs? 8 What was Paul willing to endure for the gospel to be heard?

- 9 Where did Jesus proclaim verse 14?
10 What should be our takeaway from this chapter?
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i Proverbs 27:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and never satisfied are the eyes of man.

ii 1 Timothy 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

iii Acts 1:22 (ESV)

²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”

iv Acts 22:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And he said, “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth;

v 2 Corinthians 10:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”

vi Acts 20:35 (ESV)

³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

vii James 2:1-4 (ESV)

¹ My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

viii Galatians 1:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother.

ix 2 Timothy 2:3-4 (ESV)

³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

x 2 Timothy 2:6 (ESV)

⁶ It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

xi 1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)

² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

xii Deuteronomy 25:4 (ESV)

⁴ “You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.

xiii Leviticus 19:13 (ESV)

¹³ “You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning.

xiv 1 Corinthians 8:13 (ESV)

¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

xv John 10:12-13 (ESV)

¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

xvi 2 Corinthians 11:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

xvii 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 (ESV)

²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

xviii **Philippians 3:14 (ESV)**

14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

xix **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

xx **Luke 7:47 (ESV)**

47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

xxi **Matthew 5:22 (ESV)**

22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

xxii **Matthew 5:28 (ESV)**

28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

xxiii **1 John 4:19 (ESV)**

19 We love because he first loved us.

xxiv **1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)**

5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

xxv **Numbers 5:9-10 (ESV)**

9 And every contribution, all the holy donations of the people of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his.

10 Each one shall keep his holy donations: whatever anyone gives to the priest shall be his.”

xxvi **Matthew 10:10-11 (ESV)**

10 no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.

11 And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart.

xxvii **John 15:12 (ESV)**

12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

xxviii **Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)**

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

xxix **Psalms 86:11 (NIV)**

11 Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.