

Financial Support of Christian Workers

1 Corinthians 9:1-14

1 Corinthians 9:1-14: *“Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we have no right to eat and drink? 5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? 7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? 8 Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” Is it oxen God is concerned about? 10 Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. 11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? 12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? 14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”*

Background Notes

In 1 Corinthians 8, the apostle Paul began a discussion of the right use of Christian liberty and the wrong use of Christian liberty. Hindering the spiritual growth of fellow believers and causing them to stumble in their Christian walk would be a wrong use of Christian liberty, even though the action that caused the stumbling was not sinful in itself. But it would become a sin against the Lord Himself if it caused a weak member of the body of Christ to stumble. Look back at 1 Corinthians 8:12: *“But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.”*

The example Paul used in chapter 8 was the issue of eating meat that had been offered to idols. The meat itself was not contaminated in any way, and Paul said it was not improper to eat this meat. But because some of the Corinthian Christians had a tender conscience about eating such meat, Paul concluded, *“...if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”* Paul would give up his right to eat meat entirely rather than causing a weaker, less mature believer to stumble.

In chapter 9, Paul gave an illustration from his own life of the principle of giving up one's rights - of restricting one's self in the interest of other believers, for the sake of the Lord and the gospel. The particular issue in chapter 9 was financial support for the Lord's servants – men and women who are involved in Christian ministry. Apparently there were some antagonists at Corinth who were trying to undermine Paul's authority as an apostle. They said that Paul was not a true apostle because the Corinthian church was not providing his financial support! Paul assured the Corinthians that he was a true apostle because he had seen the Lord like the other apostles (v1), and because he had led the Corinthians to the Lord and had founded the church at Corinth (v2).

Paul went to great lengths in this chapter to show that he had every *right* as one of the Lord's servants to receive financial remuneration for the work he was doing, but he had purposely restricted himself. Paul did not take advantage of this *right* when he labored at Corinth, so that there would be no wrong ideas as to why he was in the ministry.

In the first half of the chapter, before he talked about his restrictions, Paul gave a number of reasons why it is not wrong for those involved in Christian ministry to receive financial remuneration for the services they render.

Doctrinal Point

Believers involved in Christian ministry have the right to financial remuneration.

It's not easy to talk about this subject when you're involved in full time Christian ministry yourself, because it could sound like you're begging for money or trying to put a guilt trip on those who are not giving. But this chapter is part of the Bible and should be studied, taught and obeyed as the Word of the Lord.

Notice that the apostle Paul uses the word "*right*" several times in this chapter, to emphasize that financial support of Christian workers and those involved in Christian ministry is proper, and according to divine pattern. Verse 4: "*Do we have no right to eat and drink*" - the right to receive remuneration that will pay for our basic needs? Verse 5: "*Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?*" Financial support should be enough to pay for the traveling expenses of both husband and wife, if the Christian workers are a married couple. (Some Christian camps and conference centers need to read this verse!)

From this verse, by the way, we see that Peter and the rest of the apostles were married, in spite of what some churches have taught to the contrary. The "brothers of the Lord" here were most likely his half brothers, possibly James and Jude, who wrote books of Scripture. Verse 5 also indicates that Paul most likely was not married; that seems to be the implication of this verse.

“Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?”(v6). Paul supported himself, and so did Barnabas, but Paul’s point was that they had the *right* to refrain from secular employment and be supported by financial gifts of believers. A number of times in the passage thus far Paul used the word *“right”* in reference to the *right* of Christian workers to financial remuneration.

Paul used some obvious illustrations to prove his point in verse 7: *“Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?”* A soldier doesn’t pay the army, and neither should a Christian “soldier” have to pay his way when he’s involved full time in “fighting the good fight.” A vineyard keeper certainly has the right to eat some of the grapes, and the shepherd has the right to drink some of the goat’s milk.

In verses 8-10, Paul showed that financial support of the Lord’s servant is a principle that was taught in the Old Testament Law. Deuteronomy 25:4 says, *“You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.”* This law was not given just to make sure that oxen got fed! It also contained a biblical principle for the financial support of Christian workers.

The logic of verse 11 is obvious: *“If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?”* It’s a divine law that if you sow, you will also reap. Paul and his team had sown spiritual things in Corinth. It was not wrong for them to reap material things from those whom they had served. Others were doing this, so why not Paul and his fellow workers? *“If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more?”(v12).*

Another Old Testament argument is used in verse 13: *“Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?”* The priests and Levites were supported by God’s people in the Old Testament. Read Numbers 18 in this connection.

This principle holds for today, just as in biblical times. The Lord’s people should support the Lord’s full-time servants. *“Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel”(v14).* The Lord Himself taught this in Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7 when He said, *“The worker is worthy of his support.”*

So the first half of 1 Corinthians 9 clearly teaches that the Lord’s people should support the Lord’s servants. In fact, it is the *right* of those who are involved in Christian ministry to be supported by those to whom they minister. However, the Lord’s servants can voluntarily give up this *right* for a specific purpose. Paul gave up this right, as he explained in verse 12 and later in the chapter, as we’ll see. But the *right* still remains as a biblical principle. Believers involved in Christian ministry have the right to financial remuneration.

Practical Application

Be an intelligent giver!

Once we become convicted and convinced that we, as the Lord's people, have the responsibility and privilege to support the Lord's work and the Lord's workers, the obvious questions are "What work, what ministry, and what workers?" Well, that's easy to answer – Dr. Dave and Growing Christians Ministries of course! [laughter]

Seriously speaking - how do you become an intelligent giver? There are many ministries and many full-time servants of the Lord. How do you sort through all of this and give intelligently? Do you give to the ministry that sends you the most letters with plaintive stories? No, that's not the key to intelligent giving. Do you give to the ministries that send you something in return, like a book or video? No, that's not the key to intelligent giving either.

Well then, what is the key to becoming an intelligent giver? First of all, you *pray* and ask for God's guidance. Then you *follow the biblical principles* of giving. There are a number of biblical principles for intelligent giving. Let me mention two.

1- Give to ministries that have been a blessing in your own life, such as your church and other ministries that have helped you to develop in your Christian life and walk. This has been the standard operating procedure at Growing Christians Ministries since we started more than thirty years ago. The believers who have been blessed by the ministry have supported the ministry - and no fundraising programs or letters have ever been needed!

2 – Give to ministries that are evangelizing and teaching the Word. Verse 14 gives this principle for intelligent giving: "*Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the **gospel** should live from the **gospel**.*" Notice I put the emphasis on "**gospel**." In other words, there are a lot of good ministries out there, but be careful that you're not giving to a ministry that is only an social welfare project. Make sure the ministries you support are seeking to bring people to the Lord and to helping them grow in the Lord.

Be an intelligent giver!