

1 Corinthians 9 • The Privileges of Leadership

Introduction

In the previous chapter Paul emphasized the example of Christ in the course of establishing the principle that Believers should do nothing that would offend a fellow Believer, especially the weaker ones. In this chapter he will use himself as an example of someone who had privileges but, for the sake of the Gospel, did not use them. In other words, when it comes to the priority and importance of living and preaching the Gospel, not even our privileges are to be pursued if they in any way hinder the Gospel.

¹Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? ²If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

³My defense to those who examine me is this: ⁴Do we not have a right to eat and drink? ⁵Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?

[Read v.1-6]

Background: Paul opens with the first of five arguments which detail that while he ministered in Corinth, he worked with his own hands and took no support from the church there. In other words, he willingly set aside not just the privilege of financial support but even the privilege of marriage for the sake of the Gospel. He is not talking about how leaders should act theoretically, but using his own, living example.

Q: What is the greater point that Paul is making?

A: At the very least he should have the same privileges afforded to him that were commonly accepted among those of the same rank and authority.

Q: What do the privileges discussed have in common?

A: Paul begins with the most basic fulfillment of daily, physical needs in the examples of marriage and food.

Application: The ministry of the Gospel is more important to true ministers than even their unchallenged right to the most basic, personal needs.

⁷Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?

[Read v.7]

Q: What is the greater point Paul is making?

A: By normal, everyday standards there is an expectation of support for one's work no matter the vocation. No soldier supports himself but receives pay and support from the government sending him; every farmer eats the fruit of his toil; every shepherd enjoys even modest rewards for tending his flock. Therefore it is not unreasonable to expect a local church to support its pastor.

The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

— Galatians 6:6–8

Q: What are the three pictures of a pastor which Paul provides in this verse?

1. A soldier – the biblical minister protects the church.
2. A farmer – the biblical minister tends a spiritual field with the purpose of producing spiritual fruit.
3. A shepherd – the biblical minister leads and feeds the sheep.

Application: *The ministry of the Gospel warrants at least the same, basic support that is expected in any endeavor – not an additional benefit above and beyond but neither an automatic reduction of same.*

⁸I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? ⁹For it is written in the Law of Moses, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? ¹⁰Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. ¹¹If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

[Read v.8-11]

Q: What is the greater point Paul is making?

A: These basic requirements which make sense as a human tradition are confirmed as a principle of God’s Word.

Q: Why is the illustration of the ox a perfect representation of the greater spiritual principles at issue?

A: In biblical times the outcome of the oxen walking on the sheaves was the separation of the grain from the chaff, a repeated biblical metaphor for being sifted spiritually and separated from the world exclusively for God alone.

Q: What does Paul provide as additional pictures of a biblical minister?

A: Both the plowman and the thresher work “in hope”, expecting to share in the spiritual harvest.

Application: *The ministry of the Gospel may require basic, physical support, but its ministers do not expect to reap earthly rewards but look forward to greater, spiritual results.*

¹²If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. ¹³Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? ¹⁴So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

[Read v.12-14]

Q: What is the final example Paul provides?

A: The Old Testament priests and Levites who shared generously in the sacrifices. The New Testament requirement of support is nothing new but a logical extension of what was established originally.

Point: *The priests were entitled to the hides from the burnt offerings, all the flesh (excluding the fat) of the sin and trespass offerings, most of the meal offering, the breast and shoulder of the peace offering, plus assorted firstfruits, tithes, and special offerings. God’s system provided generously for His ministers through the approach of His people to worship and serve Him.*

Q: Does Paul say that NOT using these privileges was wrong?

A: He is making the case that forgoing these privileges was an additional step over and above their rights for support as established by Christ Himself.

“Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support.

— Matthew 10:9–10

“Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.

— Luke 10:7

Application: *True ministers are more concerned for the ministry of the Gospel than even the basic privileges assigned for its proponents. Nothing is allowed – neither good nor evil – to hinder it in the slightest.*

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[Summary]

Paul provides the minimum expectations for those dedicated to full-time ministry of the Gospel. It is very interesting when compared to what is expected in the Church today when it comes to the vocation of pastor, particularly with those we might term “money preachers” who demand compensation which far surpasses not just their basic needs, but those of the average members of their flock. The greater application here is that true ministers are far more concerned about the **spiritual** payback than the material. In fact, if the spiritual is somehow perceived to be at risk, they will even forgo the meager minimum requirements they are entitled to. The spiritual **always** takes precedence over the earthly.

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;
— Philipians 1:27

¹⁵But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. ¹⁶For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. ¹⁷For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. ¹⁸What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

[Read v.15-18]

Q: How would you contrast Paul’s message from this point on against what was just established?

A: From here on Paul provides several reasons why he did not exercise the privileges to which ministers of the Gospel are entitled.

Q: How would you say Paul looked at the task of preaching the Gospel? Was it just a normal task that was part of his required job definition?

A: Paul states “I have a stewardship entrusted to me” (v.17) which he expresses as, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel”. (v.16)

Q: So why did Paul not enforce the minimum privileges which also come with his calling as a minister of the Gospel?

A: He sums it up as, “What then is my reward?” (v.18)

Q: What is the greater principle guiding Paul where the Gospel is concerned?

A: Paul glorified in a free Gospel of free grace which he saw as a privilege to preach. He would do nothing which might inappropriately reflect on the grace of God and His offer of free salvation, even if it meant personal sacrifice.

Application: True ministers do not look upon their responsibilities as burdens but instead view them as blessings, seeking any way possible to both bless and be blessed.

¹⁹For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.

[Read v.19a]

Q: How might we describe a minister who is a “good” slave as opposed to a “bad” slave?

A: A “bad” slave is someone so concerned about their vocation’s remuneration that they dilute the message, or dare not offend members who are “heavy givers”, or are afraid of losing denominational or organizational support. Where the Gospel is concerned, “good” slaves want to work independently.

Application: True ministers want no master except Christ alone.

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¹⁹For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; ²¹to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. ²³I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

[Read v.19b-23]

Q: Although the translators are correct in using the term “slave”, what does it actually describe?

A: Slavery in modern times became a horrific institution which did not mirror what took place in ancient times. A slave was far more likely to be someone who went to work exclusively for their master, living with him and tending to his business. In return, the slave was taken care of, educated, and may have even achieved elevated success in his master’s household or business. In modern English “slave” might better be understand as “servant”, which is also Jesus’ standard for New Testament leadership.

And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”

— Luke 22:25–27

Q: Is Paul actually teaching the modern equivalent of, “When in Rome, do what the Romans do?”

A: We have to understand this within the greater context of the overall teaching leading into these verses. Paul was not compromising by lowering his standards, but was relating to people by setting aside his personal privileges. He tried to meet the needs of those needing Christ by sympathizing with their experiences.

Q: How are these different types of people listed actually reflected in Paul personally?

A: Paul was both a Jew and a Roman citizen. In other words, he had the personal ability and background to identify both with “those who are under the Law” (the Jews) as well as “those who are without law” (the Gentiles). It testifies that he does not merely relate to them from an earthly perspective but in terms of their spiritual perspectives as well.

Q: Is Paul saying there are situations where he sets aside obedience to God’s Word and ways?

A: Paul qualifies that he is always “under the law of Christ”. He is speaking more about each group’s earthly traditions, that he could use the Law of Moses as a key to open the Jewish heart just as he could use the moral law as a key to open the Gentile heart.

Q: What is the third group identified by Paul?

A: “The weak”. (v.22) It describes people who are not very observant of their own traditions whether they are Jews who are not Torah observant or Gentiles who put little stock in their own faith or values. Paul recognized their spiritual condition as rooted in a different set of issues requiring an appropriate approach.

Q: What is Paul’s overriding goal and concern?

A: “That I may win more”. (v.19) He set aside his privileges as a Jew “that I might win Jews” (v.20), he set aside his privileges as a Roman citizen “that I might win those who are without law” (v.21), and set aside his privileges as a person of education and faith “that I might win the weak”

(v.22).

Application: True ministers of the Gospel sacrifice their own privileges in order to win the lost.

²⁴Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

[Read v.24-27]

Q: What is the greater thing to which Paul attributes the work of setting aside one's privileges for the sake of the Gospel?

A: "Discipline" (v.27) and "self-control" (v.25). He is not casually casting aside anything, but pursuing a planned, determined approach toward being a successful minister of the Gospel in every situation.

Q: How does this relate to the illustration of an Olympic athlete?

A: Such athletes would pursue a special diet, an aggressive schedule of training, and in general choose a much more disciplined and aggressive lifestyle than a normal person in order to achieve much greater goals.

Q: How is this illustration transcended for the greater, spiritual issues at hand?

A: "They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable". (v.25) If earthly athletes lay aside privileges to win a perishable, earthly crown, how much more can Christians lay aside privileges to attain an eternal crown.

Q: Why does Paul express a fear of being "disqualified"? Is he teaching that we are saved by our works?

A: Paul is actually expressing the true Christian condition that we are not saved by running the race and winning, but that we are running in the race **because** we are saved.

Q: How do we know that our obligation to the Gospel does not simply end at delivering the message?

A: "...so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified". (v.27) That proof of someone who authoritatively "talks the talk" is proven by the the fact that they visibly "walk the walk".

Application: True ministers of the Gospel are living, visible examples of the Gospel, not merely messengers. Spiritually they are examples of discipline and self-control where God's Word and ways are concerned, a personal testimony of the working of the Gospel.

Overall Application

True ministers of the Gospel are not afraid of losing their salvation, but of losing their reward for faithful, sacrificial service. They will even forgo what is rightfully due them in order to not only advance the Gospel for its own sake, but to establish their own testimony and credibility with those to whom they minister. How well does this align with your own ministry and testimony both to the saved and unsaved alike?