

## First Epistle to the Corinthians

### 16 – Essay Three: Freedom and Responsibility (3.2) – Paul’s Personal Freedom and Responsibility

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

#### 1. Outlines

##### a. *ESV Study Bible*

- i. Three Issues from a Corinthian Letter (7:1–11:1)
  1. Marriage, divorce, and unchangeable circumstances (7:1–24)
  2. The betrothed and widows (7:25–40)
  3. Food offered to idols (8:1–11:1)

##### b. *Reading the New Testament Series*

- i. The Limits of Christian Freedom (8:1-11:1)
  1. **A.** Two issues, (1) and (2) (8:1- 13)
  2. **B.** The example of Paul (apostolic freedom and slavery) (9:1- 23)
  3. **B'.** The examples of Paul and Israel (necessity of self- control) (9:24- 10:13)
  4. **A'.** Two issues, (2) and (1) (10:14- 11:1)

##### c. *Kenneth E. Bailey*<sup>1</sup>

- i. Freedom and Responsibility (8:1-11:1)
  1. Food Offered to Idols: Freedom and Responsibility (8:1-13)
    - a. Christians must surrender personal rights for the sake of others
  2. Paul’s Personal Freedom and Responsibility (9:1-18)
  3. Freedom in Mission: Full Identification (9:19-27)
  4. Old Covenant Sacraments and Idolatry: Partial Identification (10:1-13)
  5. New Covenant Sacraments and Idolatry: No Identification (10:14-22)
  6. Food Offered to Idols: Freedom and Responsibility – A Final Word (10:23-11:1)

#### 2. Rhetoric (9:1-12a)

- a. In previous section, Paul agreed that because idols aren’t real, you do have *the right* to eat food offered to idols. Here Paul describes his personal freedoms.
- b. Approach (1)-(2), ring composition (3)-(9)
- c. Paul’s defense of his apostleship in (1) and (2)
- d. Paul’s rights in (3) and (9)
- e. Paul uses five parables/metaphors in (4)-(8) to defend his rights
- f. Paul refers to scripture in (5)-(7)
- g. Paul cites from Deut. 25:4 in (6)

Table 1: Bailey, location 2816

1 Corinthians 9:1-12a (ESV)		Rhetoric
1	9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?	My identity <i>These four lines parallel the next four</i>

<sup>1</sup> Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 2632

1 Corinthians 9:1-12a (ESV)		Rhetoric
2	2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for <i>you are</i> the seal of my apostleship [you are] in the Lord.	
3	3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to eat and drink? 5 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? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?	My rights
4	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?	Soldier Vinedresser Shepherd
5	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,	Torah of Moses
6	You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.	Scripture The Ox
7	Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 10 Does he not certainly [or, <i>especially</i> ] speak for our sake? It was written for our sake,	Torah of God
8	because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.	Plowman Thresher
9	11 If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?	My rights

### 3. Thoughts on 9:1-12a

- a. What issues do you think Paul is addressing?
- b. How does this relate to the preceding passage (8:1-13)?
- c. What present-day application(s) might we conclude?
- d. What assumptions might we be reading into the passage?

### 4. Examination of 9:1-12a

- a. Two questions – these are the crux to understanding today’s passage
  - i. Why does Paul feel the need to defend his apostolic authority?
  - ii. Why does Paul feel the need to defend apostolic rights?
- b. Ministry and remuneration
  - i. We tend to view those who sacrifice for ministry in a positive light
  - ii. The Jews would likely have seen things similarly – they opposed profiting from ministry
  - iii. The Greeks/Romans saw things quite differently
    1. Philosophers and teachers – the educated – were of the aristocracy
    2. They were not to labor – they were to be supported through patrons
    3. Paul and Barnabas refused patronage and labored for themselves
    4. Other gospel ministers/apostles did accept support

5. Thus a question in the minds of the Corinthians: are Paul and Barnabas really apostles?

... There was no doubt friction between Paul and the Corinthians because he worked with his hands. For most Jewish believers this would not have been a problem... The rabbis supported themselves financially, often through some trade or skill. Indeed they were *required* to do so... On the other hand, for Christians with a Greek background things were different. Intellectuals were expected to be financially independent. Only with the leisure that comes from such independence was it possible to cultivate the mind. How could Greeks accept the intellectual and spiritual leadership of a tentmaker?<sup>2</sup>

- c. Paul defends his apostleship and his rights
- i. He is an apostle because of two things –
    1. He has seen “Jesus our Lord”
    2. The Corinthians are “in the Lord” because of his work with them
  - ii. He wants to make sure the Corinthians are absolutely clear that Paul knows he is entitled to the rights expected of apostles

Can anything be said in our day about "apostles"? Given the two criteria expressed here, one would have to allow that apostles do not exist in the sense that Paul defines his own ministry. But it should also be noted that this might be too narrow a view, based strictly on Paul's own personal experience. His more functional understanding of apostleship (see on 1:1) would certainly have its modern counterparts in those who found and lead churches in unevangelized areas. Only when "apostle" is used in a non-Pauline sense of "guarantors of the traditions" would the usage be narrowed to the first century.<sup>3</sup>

- d. Paul is NOT saying it is okay to demand one's rights if they are not granted
- i. We miss the point if we assume the Corinthians were somehow reluctant in offering Paul support – they were probably eager to do so
  - ii. Paul did not have to ask for their help – they would have given it without being asked
  - iii. The problem was in Paul's refusal to accept their support
  - iv. Quite a different issue from what we typically see in our church communities today
  - v. It is inappropriate for church leaders to use this passage to berate parishioners for their (apparent) lack of support

Paul's response to this is not first of all to defend his renunciation of his rights, but to establish that he has such rights. This must be done because they have questioned his authority altogether. From their point of view his activity would not have been the renunciation of assumed rights; rather, he must have worked with his hands because he lacked such rights. Since, therefore, he did not do as the others—accept patronage—he must not be a genuine apostle.<sup>4</sup>

- e. Digression: On the “Is it for oxen that God is concerned?” (vv. 9-10)

---

<sup>2</sup> Bailey, location 2874.

<sup>3</sup> *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*, entry for 1 Cor. 9:2.

<sup>4</sup> *NICNT*, introductory text for 1 Cor. 9:3-14.

- i. This verse has apparently been taken at times to mean that God is not at all concerned about animals; *therefore, neither should Christians*
- ii. The issue is around the translation of πάντως (pantōs) – “Does he not *pantōs* speak for our sake?”
  - 1. *Only* for our sake? *Certainly* for our sake? *Especially* for our sake?

5. Rhetoric (9:12b-18)

- a. Two subsections: (1)-(4) and (4)-(10)
- b. (1), (4), and (10) – “I am not using my rights”
- c. (2) and (3) – OT and NT traditions placed side-by-side – duty and rights
- d. (5) and (9) – grounds for boasting and reward
- e. (6) and (8) – no reward for duty
- f. (7) – reward for going beyond duty

Table 2: Bailey, location 2887

1 Corinthians 9:12b-18 (ESV)		Rhetoric
1	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.	Not using my rights
2	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?	Temple (OT)
3	14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.	Lord's Command (NT)
4	15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision.	Not using my rights
5	For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting.	Ground for Boasting
6	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!	Necessity
7	17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward,	If of my will I have--reward
8	but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship.	Commission
9	18 What then is my [ground for] reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge,	Ground for Reward
10	so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.	Not using my rights

6. Thoughts on 9:12b-18

- a. What do you think Paul is telling the Corinthians?
- b. How does this relate to 8:1-13?
- c. What do you think are present-day applications?

- d. What assumptions might we be reading into the passage?
7. Examination of 9:12b-18
- a. Rights are not required to be exercised
    - i. Scriptural precedent for ministers to receive support from those he ministers to
    - ii. Jesus' words also support this right (Luke 10:7-8)
    - iii. Paul defends his rights, but makes sure all is clear he does not demand them; moreover, he will not exercise them
  - b. Sacred food
    - i. Verse 13 – thematic connection with first part of this essay – “sacrificial offerings”
    - ii. Reinforcing the subjective realities of sacrifices and God/gods
  - c. Boasting – in the context of honor/shame
    - i. There are no grounds for gaining honor in doing what is required – for Paul, this is preaching the gospel
    - ii. Vv. 16-17 – If Paul is preaching the gospel of his own volition, then he certainly deserves some kind of pay/reward, but this task was given to him by Christ; therefore, Paul cannot claim honor for simply performing his duties
    - iii. V.18 – But Paul does say he deserves and does receive pay/reward. His grounds for this claim is that he is going beyond his expected duties. He gains honor for refusing to exercise his rights. He gains honor for relinquishing his freedoms.
      1. This is in stark contrast to the Corinthians who were insisting on exercising their “Christian” rights and freedoms and “boasting” about it
  - d. Other reasons why Paul might have refused support
    - i. So as not to be obligated to the Corinthians
      1. In the patronage system, all gifts have “strings attached”<sup>5</sup>
      2. Paul refuses to get himself and the Corinthians become entangled in the patron-client system
      3. Paul finds his Christian freedom in giving up his Christian rights

Everything is done so as not to hinder the gospel (v. 12b), so as not to misuse his authority in the gospel (v. 18). By presenting the gospel "free of charge" he is himself thereby "free from all people"; no one except Christ has a claim on him (v. 19). Although he does not expressly say so here, his presenting the gospel "free of charge" also becomes a lived out paradigm of the gospel itself.<sup>6</sup>
    - ii. Because the gospel is itself free, and its purpose is to free
 

In one sense his "pay" is in fact to receive "no pay"! But in the present argument this nonpayment "payment" also gives him his apostolic "freedom" from all, so that he might the more freely make himself a slave to everyone (v. 19). Thus in terms of his own ministry, his "pay" turns out to be his total freedom from all merely human impositions on his ministry.<sup>7</sup>
  - e. Grace of the gospel is offensive – but not in the way we often assume
    - i. Grace is offensive because it is free

<sup>5</sup> See in *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes*, chapter 7, “First Things First: Rules and Relationships.”

<sup>6</sup> *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 9:14.

<sup>7</sup> *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 9:18.

- ii. Paul's relinquishing of his rights in preaching the gospel is a living illustration of the free nature of grace and its offensiveness to human wisdom and expectations

By preaching the gospel "freely," that is, without accepting "pay," he is able further to illustrate the "free" nature of the gospel. Almost certainly this stands over against the itinerant philosophers and missionaries, who "peddled" their "wisdom" or religious instruction...<sup>8</sup>

- iii. We tend to be suspicious of no-strings-attached gifts. When we receive gifts we assume it is either 1) in return for some favor already given, or 2) to indebted us for some future request
- iv. Even when we are assured there are no strings attached, we feel emotionally obligated to the giver
- v. In the case of family and friends, there may be no strings attached but we expect gifts and favors simply because we are family and friends and we expect to do the same toward them
- vi. God's grace is offensive because it is given freely, to everyone, and no one can earn it or pay for it – there is no honor in accepting God's grace; only shame<sup>9</sup>
- vii. Christians gain honor by relinquishing their rights and freedoms for the well-being and concern for others.

Those who are quick to see vv. 4–14 as applicable to today's ministry would probably do well to spend some time with this paragraph as well, and ask in terms of their own ministries how their "use" of their rights might at the same time become a "misuse"—of such a kind that the gospel itself is not so clearly heard in our day. It would not seem to require a lot of imagination to think of several such misuses, even in the most innocent of circumstances. Then the question really does become one of "rights" over against the gospel. The question is not whether one has the rights, but whether that is important. Those who see their calling as "necessity laid upon them" should also be glad to readjust their lives for the sake of the gospel.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 9:12b.

<sup>9</sup> This is not guilt-shame, but shame in the honor-shame cultural context. See *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes*, Chapter 5, "Have You No Shame? Honor/Shame and Right/Wrong."

<sup>10</sup> *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 9:18.