

16. The rights of an apostle

September 23, 2018

This is one of those studies that I don't care to teach, because it is going to sound like I am promoting to get paid more or wanting to be rich out of your kindness. If I could, I would skip to the meaty portion of the Scripture in the latter part of chapter 9. But I cannot do that because it is a part of this Book and as the teacher of the Word, I have to be faithful to every part of His Word.

Remember, the context of our previous study in chapter 8? Paul is speaking to the Corinthian Christians about their "right" based on "knowledge" to eat meat sacrificed to idols from a temple restaurant or the temple meat market.

Paul will ask them to let go of their "right" to eat meat sacrificed to idols, even as Paul himself has let go his own rights as an apostle. But Paul will also use this occasion to defend his apostolic position before these cynical and immature Corinthian Christians.

A. PAUL, AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST

1 Corinthians 9:1-2 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.

As we studied before, one of the qualifications that the apostles of Christ must have is seeing Jesus face to face, not just a vision of Him. We have no doubt about seeing Jesus in person for all 11 apostles who spent 3 years with the Lord during His earthly ministry. But what about Paul who was Saul of Tarsus, once a staunch persecutor of Christianity? He, too, met Jesus on the way to Damascus to chase after the Christians according to Acts 9. Then, sometime later, Paul dropped off the grid and was taken to the desert by the Lord Jesus for 3 years – personally tutored by the Lord Himself according to the Book of Galatians 1:17.

Paul insists that he did not merely see a vision of Jesus, but an authentic appearance of the post-resurrection Jesus. The work of God among the Corinthian Christians was evidence enough of Paul's apostolic credentials. In fact, they were the seal of Paul's apostleship in the Lord.

Some today, because of visions or experiences they claim to have had, claim to be apostles on the level of Paul. But those who claim to be the modern day apostles are nothing more than self-claimed apostles who have never seen Jesus in person. They are bogus and their claims should be ignored. The office of the apostles of Jesus Christ has been closed with the apostle Paul.

B. PAUL'S RIGHT AS AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST

1 Corinthians 9:3-6 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?

Paul will now assert his rights as an apostle. The Greek word of 'defense,' "apologia" is a legal word, taken from the Roman law court. We get the word "Apologetic" which means the Defense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" from this word. Paul feels like he's on trial – or that he has already been condemned by the

Corinthian Christians. He means that he has the right to eat and drink at the expense of the churches he served.

Paul is making it clear that he had the right to expect support for not only himself, but for his family also, as do the other apostles. Apparently, most of the other apostles were married, and their wives traveled with them as they did ministry.

This is especially interesting concerning Peter – a.k.a. Cephas, who was obviously married – yet still considered by the Roman Catholic church to be the first pope, in contradiction to the principle of mandatory celibacy.

Paul and Barnabas were unique in this regard, choosing the work of tent making and support themselves, so that no one could accuse them of preaching for a money motive. We might think this would make Paul and Barnabas more respected in the sight of the Corinthian Christians.

By the way, because of Paul's two jobs – being a pastor and being a tentmaker, amongst pastors, it is common words for bi-vocational pastors to say, "My tent making job is..." For my case, my tentmaking job is being an artist.

C. PAUL'S RIGHT AS THE FOUNDER OF THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

1 Corinthians 9:7-14 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.

I feel really bad for the apostle Paul and Barnabas. They went out of their ways not be burdens to the Corinthian church congregation. Instead of being grateful to them, these immature and snotty Corinthians assumed that Paul was not good enough since he had a side job to support himself. It was a typical ancient Greeks' high and mighty mindset that regarded people with manual labor jobs as low class, because it was for slaves.

Paul sharpens his point with Scripture, finding support from another man of God, Moses in v9 through 11.

By the way, we must not make the mistake of thinking that Paul means to explain that commandment allegorically. Because some silly people make this an excuse for turning everything into allegory, so that they change dogs into men, trees into angels, and convert the whole of Scripture into an amusing game.

Just as strongly as Paul affirms his right to be supported by the people he ministers unto, he will also affirm his right to not use that right – if using it might hinder the Gospel of Christ. Here we see Paul’s real heart: paid or not paid, it did not matter to him. What mattered to Paul was the work of the Gospel.

I have been a strong advocate of paying hard working pastors to live adequately way before I became a pastor. Previously I was on the boards of directors for a couple of other Calvary Chapels and I am currently on the board of directors for our out-reach fellowship, Calvary Santa Cruz, where pastor Herb Perez is pastoring.

Some Christians think that pastors should get paid just enough to keep them out of the poverty line in order to keep them humble. That is a sick, twisted mindset. Nobody can make any one humble, but oneself. For those people, I have a question: “Can you make an adequate living with the salary you pay for your pastor?” If not, pay him more.

I am NOT saying this to ask for a raise for myself. I get paid well here. Yes, I still have my tentmaking job. The Lord blessed me with the two jobs that I love to do.

D. PAUL’S REWARD

1 Corinthians 9:15-18 But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. 16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

In their days, the Greek cities were filled with all kinds of itinerant teachers and preachers, most of whom were out to make money. Not only had Paul refused to use the kind of oratory and arguments that these teachers used, but he also refused to accept money from those to whom he ministered. He wanted the message of the Gospel to be free from any obstacles or hindrances in the minds of lost sinners.

What was Paul’s reward? The joy of preaching the Gospel without charge. This meant that no man could accuse him of underhanded motives or methods as he shared the Good News of Jesus Christ.

It is unfortunate when the ministry of the Gospel is sometimes hindered by an overemphasis on money. The unsaved world is convinced that most preachers, pastors, and missionaries are only involved in “religious rackets” to take money from innocent people. These people bring horrible reproaches to Christianity and the name of Christ. And the Lord will severely punish them according to His will and time.

1 Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, 4 he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, 5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

Paul had the right to be supported, but he did not use that right. In writing this, Paul was not “hinting” for support by the Corinthian Christians. He is showing them the

value, and the reasons, for giving up one's own rights that connect to what he already said about not eating meat for the sake of others' weak conscience. Paul's boasting wasn't that he preached the Gospel, but that he was able to do it without asking his hearers for support.

E. PAUL'S GOAL

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

Though he has both Christians and unbelievers in mind, we will limit it to Christians only:

1) To win Christian legalists – v20:

These believers are the ones who live under a rigid system of dos and don'ts. They haven't yet grasped their liberty in Christ. To free them, we first may have to submit to their moral standard without a compromise. Because of Paul's restraint on himself, many under the law were brought above it to enjoy the full knowledge of Christ.

2) To win Christian libertines – v21:

The freedom abusers use their Christian liberty in ways that dishonor God and hurt the fellow believers. To correct them, Paul encourages seeking the truth of the liberty in Christ. He urges us to associate with these believers – not compromising our standards but winning them over with love.

3) To win Christian babes – v22-23:

This group of people gets offended easily, and their tendency to slip back into sin runs high. More than anything else, they need mature believers to teach them Christianity's essentials and help them apply those truths to life. To begin this training process, we may have to restrain our liberty, at least while we're with them.

Paul was free to do what he wanted, but bringing people to Jesus was more important to him than using the freedom selfishly. To outside observers, it might have looked like Paul's life was inconsistent. But he consistently pursued one goal: to win people to Jesus.

Paul sought to win people to Jesus Christ by being sensitive to their needs and identifying with them. We should try to reach people where they are today and expect to see changes later.

We should not think Paul changed his doctrine or message to appeal to different groups; but he would change his behavior and manner of approach.

F. APPLICATION

As the apostle Paul sought to win people to Jesus Christ by being sensitive to their needs and identifying with them, so should we try to reach people where they are today with the Gospel of Jesus and expect to see the Holy Spirit's work in their lives later.