

## Week 9, 1 Corinthians 9

### Hook



**Main Point:** Gospel progress is for the sake of God's kingdom, not ours.

### Video

Play the video linked below. The clip features Logan Tom, an outside hitter on the USA women's national volleyball team as she describes the sacrifices necessary to earn a spot on the Olympic team.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CKWPjKM1u8>

***Describe the period in your life when you were in peak physical condition. What did it take to reach that level of fitness?***

***Describe a goal in your life that you sacrificed for; what did it take to achieve that goal?***

***Describe a historical or current hero of the faith. What did that person sacrifice for the Gospel?***

## **Week 9, 1 Corinthians 9**

### **Book**

**Main Point:** Gospel progress is for the sake of God's kingdom, not ours.

#### **Text Summary: 1 Corinthians 9**

Paul continues his argument from chapter 8 as he exhorts the Corinthians to surrender their personal rights and freedoms for the sake of the advancement of the Gospel. The main argument that Paul uses to defend this way of life here in chapter 9 is the fact that he is a servant of the church but is not compensated financially by the congregation. Paul explains that he has every right and is justified to take a salary from the Corinthian congregation, but he refuses. He wants the Gospel to be free from any strings. He wants the Gospel to go forth unhindered by any pull or sway from the congregation. Paul uses this situation to show that he forfeits his rights within the surrounding culture in order for a greater, more positive reception of the Gospel's message. He urges these Christians in Corinth to do the same.

#### **1 Corinthians 9:1–18 [Read]**

**Sub-point:** Hard labor deserves reward.

Chapter 9 flows from Paul's arguments against Christian entitlement in chapter 8. The apostle is attempting to persuade the Corinthians to change their mindsets concerning the freedom they have in Christ. The closing of chapter 8 finds Paul claiming that if giving up meat would help a brother to have a healthier walk with Jesus, he would become a vegetarian.

Paul now moves from what he would hypothetically give up in order to strengthen the body of Christ to what he already has sacrificed to strengthen the body of Christ. Through the course of this chapter, Paul will establish that he is deserving of financial support from the Corinthians and yet he refuses to be compensated. The apostle believed that taking money from the church at Corinth had the potential to harm ministry, and so he denies himself.

Paul begins creating his case for compensation by asking four rhetorical questions in verses 1 and 2 to which the understood answer is yes. Paul is free. He is an apostle. He has seen Jesus. The Corinthian church is proof of his work. Paul is where he belongs. He is qualified to be over them. He is, after all, the church's founder. He is admitting that he has done much work; these points build a case for compensation.

Verse 3 looks forward to Paul's defense to those who would question why he is not taking money from the church at Corinth. Chapter 9 will serve as a practical example as to what it looks like to have rights and deny them for the sake of the Gospel (the point of chapter 8).

The author uses six different lines of defense as to why someone who is vocationally in the service of the Lord (such as himself) should receive compensation.

1. Other people who work (soldiers, farmers, shepherds) receive support for their labor (v. 7).
2. The Old Testament supports the idea of fair remuneration (vv. 8–10).
3. Beneficial service for the community should be rewarded (v. 11).
4. Other ministers are paid for their work (v. 12).
5. Old Testament priests were compensated (v. 13).
6. Jesus commanded it (v. 14).<sup>1</sup>

With such a strong case for the Corinthian church’s putting Paul on the payroll, the author now moves his focus as to why he insists on remaining a volunteer. His first reason is that payment for his services might cause him to be a stumbling block for others (v. 12). Paul and Barnabas (the other half of the “we” in this verse) did not want to be lumped in with other itinerant teachers, motivated by money.<sup>2</sup> If this occurred, they would run the risk of losing credibility and influence as he sought to do the work of the ministry.

Paul moves on in verses 15 through 18 to present another, this one impassioned, reason as to why he does not accept a reward for preaching the Gospel. Paul shares that taking funds for his labor would remove his ground for boasting; that “ground for boasting” is the fact that he refuses to be compensated for his ministry (v. 15). For most, men must make a decision to follow their call to preach or not. But Paul’s dramatic conversion and extreme call on his life made it apparent to him that he had no choice in the matter—he must preach the Gospel (vv. 16–17). Therefore the apostle does not boast in preaching the Gospel because he has no say in the matter; if he refuses, he faces consequences (v. 16). Further, Paul felt that he could not receive compensation for a task that he did not choose on his own.

Paul was certainly not without reward. He had the boast that he preached the Gospel without charge (vv. 15, 18) and he had the privilege of seeing people come to Christ.<sup>3</sup> There was such an immense joy in seeing the Gospel work in the lives of unbelievers to the point of conviction and conversion. It was fuel for Paul, the reason to continue his mission even in the face of adversity. He would give up any of his rights if that meant that more would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Paul knew his freedoms (v. 1) and he would willingly become a servant to all to win more for the Lord (v. 19).

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<sup>1</sup> David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 523.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 524.

***Why does Paul say that he gives up his rights in verse 12?***

***Instead of financial compensation, what is Paul's reward that he refers to in verse 18?***

***What is Paul's purpose in his opening remarks and four rhetorical questions?***

### **1 Corinthians 9:19–27 [Read]**

**Sub-point:** Live your life with a goal in mind—the furthering of the Gospel.

Paul would give up any of his rights if it meant that more would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Paul knew his freedoms (v. 1) and he would willingly become a servant to all to win more for the Lord (v. 19).

Verses 20 through 23 exemplify the principle of becoming servant to all to win them to Christ. Around those under the Law, i.e., the Jews, Paul says he lived in such a way that his freedom in Christ didn't lead them astray or was a point of contention in terms of finding commonality (v. 21). To those not under the Law, i.e., the Gentiles, Paul wasn't rigid to make them confused or misunderstood (v. 22). The “weak” in verse 23 is most likely a reference to individuals who are already believers. For these, Paul was working to help spur them toward sanctification, not salvation.<sup>4</sup>

In these three examples, Paul isn't encouraging the Corinthians to compromise their beliefs. Instead, he presents them with a challenge to live a life of self-sacrifice, just as Christ did. Paul explains to the Corinthians that they shouldn't let their rights and freedom compromise the gospel.<sup>5</sup>

In his defense, Paul uses the analogy of the athlete because the Isthmian Games were held in Corinth biannually and Paul knew the Corinthians would understand the discipline needed for successful, national athletes. He shows them how athletes give up their rights for the sake of training. Their diets. Their work habits. They do all this for the reward of their victory and the wreath presented to them. Paul connects this to the Gospel and says “how much more so” should we be disciplined and give up our rights for the sake of the imperishable, eternal reward of eternity with Christ. And this isn't our victory, it's His!

Our discipline, Paul's discipline, brings potential victory for others. Scholars debate verse 27 and Paul's usage of “unapproved” or “disqualified.” This phrase must be understood in its context,

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<sup>4</sup> David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 525.

<sup>5</sup> Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing.

and the context is not doctrinal. Paul isn't referring to the fact of losing one's salvation. Paul is saying we must stay disciplined in order to stay healthy, stay in the race, and keep our faith strong. The context "has more to do with God's final verdict on his people for which there will be both reward and loss."<sup>6</sup>

Paul makes it clear in the beginning of his letter that he believes God will keep these fellow believers until the end. He mentions this in 1:2 and 1:8-9. Paul is merely saying press on, work out your faith through discipline and giving up your rights, so that one day Christ will say "Well done, good and faithful servant."

***Why has Paul made himself a servant even though he explains earlier in chapter 9 that he is free?***

***What is the prize that Christians will receive?***

***Why was the athlete imagery practical for the people of Corinth? How does that encourage us in the way we relate the Gospel to those around us?***

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<sup>6</sup> Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 224.

## Week 9, 1 Corinthians 9

### Took



**Main Point: Gospel progress is for the sake of God's kingdom, not ours.**

### Video

Watch the video below. The short clip features the story of Lottie Moon, a missionary to China. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fq86flWNaAc>

***What rights did Lottie Moon relinquish during her missionary work? What motivated her?***

***What rights have you given up for the sake of the Gospel?***

***What rights have you insisted on that have perhaps limited you from reaching more for Jesus?***

**Lesson Conclusion:** Jesus came to set the captive free. Paul is clear on this in his letter to the Galatians. But freedom in Christ is not the same as worldly freedom. When we are free in Christ, we are free from ourselves, from our own sin. This means we live by a new law since we are new creation. We live under the authority of Christ the King. Paul explains to the Corinthians that the Christian never uses his freedom in such a way that makes a stumbling block to the Gospel. Rather, the Christian uses his freedom to make a clearer path to the Gospel, and that means giving up individual rights for the sake of the kingdom of God. When we do that, we give up our identity and we put on Christ's in order that we understand and interact with the world around us in grace-filled, selfless ways. This is the path of the Christian. It is a communal path rather than an individualistic one.

### Challenge

**Practice spiritual disciplines.** Spiritual disciplines are an excellent, practical step in surrendering our rights and freedoms. They are also the ways we can commune with the Lord and grow in holiness. What are some of the spiritual disciplines? Prayer, personal reading of Scripture, fasting, confession. Practicing these daily/weekly allows us to surrender not just our time, but our thoughts and passions and actions under the reign of Christ.

**Break down walls.** Paul's purpose in being all things to all people was not to be a false depiction of his true self, but rather letting go of his own identity and taking up Christ's identity. We see this throughout Scripture, Christ's meeting those He came in contact with on their level. Paul encourages us to do the same. Remove any prideful sense of identity that you may have, whether that be your job, ethnicity or marital status, and take up the Spirit of Christ to make a more gentle path to the receiving of the Gospel message. Break down the barriers within your power and then ask the Spirit to do the rest.

**Look forward.** Pray the Lord would give you vision for the prize that is awaiting you when Christ returns. Let this bring hope and confidence in the here and now for what Christ is coming to do and the new world He will bring. Let that free you to live a life of faithfulness to Him, knowing He is coming again to make all things new.