

Chapter 9

The rights of an apostle 9:1-27

Paul is a real apostle 9:1-2

v1 You know that I am free. You know that I am an apostle. I have seen Jesus our Lord. After all, you are the result of my work in the Lord. v2 I may not be an apostle to other people. But I certainly am to you. Because you are the seal that I am the Lord's apostle.

Verse 1 Paul continued to speak about his own freedom. Some Christians at Corinth denied that he was a real apostle. This was because he did not expect to receive pay for his work. So Paul mentioned two facts. They showed that he was an apostle.

1. He had seen Jesus. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus was an appearance of Jesus after his resurrection. 'Last of all, he appeared to me also' (1 Corinthians 15:8).
2. The Christians at Corinth themselves showed that Paul was an apostle. Paul calls them his 'seal'. A seal was an official stamp on a legal record. It showed that it was genuine. The church at Corinth was the 'seal' that Paul was a genuine apostle. Paul's successful work in Corinth was a proof that God's power was working by him.

Paul compares himself with other people 9:3-6

v3 This is my defence to those who are trying to judge me. v4 We must have the right to food and drink. v5 We travel. We could take a wife who is a believer with us. I suppose that we have that right. The other apostles do it. The Lord's brothers and Cephas do it. v6 It cannot only be Barnabas and I who must work for ourselves.

Verse 5 Paul does not say who he means by the 'other apostles'. The 'Lord's brothers'

were James, Joseph (also called Joses), Judas (or Jude) and Simon (Mark 6:3). They were sons of Joseph and Mary after Jesus was born. (However, some people think that they were Jesus' cousins, or sons from a previous marriage of Joseph.)

James and the other brothers did not believe in Jesus until after his resurrection. Jesus made a special appearance to James (1 Corinthians 15:7). Later, James became a leader in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-21; 21:18).

Cephas is the Aramaic word for Peter. Aramaic is the language that Jesus spoke. Jesus also made a special appearance to Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5). We know that Peter had a wife, because Jesus healed his wife's mother (Luke 4:38-39). Paul may have met her when he first visited Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18).

Verse 6 Barnabas had introduced Paul to the Christians in Jerusalem. They sent Barnabas to help the church in Antioch. He brought Paul from Tarsus to work with him there. He and Paul worked together in Asia Minor (Acts chapters 13-14). But they could not agree that they should take Mark, a relative of Barnabas, on a second journey. So Paul and Barnabas separated. Barnabas went to preach in Cyprus, the country where he was born. And Paul went to Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36-39).

Examples from ordinary life 9:7-12a

v7 You do not hear about a soldier who does not get any pay. Nor does a man plant a vineyard and not eat any of its fruit. No one looks after the sheep and the goats and does not use their milk. v8 You must not think that I depend on these human examples

alone. **v9** *In the law of Moses we read this: 'You must not prevent a male cow from eating some of the corn that it is threshing.'* I do not believe that God was only thinking about male cows. **v10** *I believe that he was also thinking about us. Of course he was. Yes, these words were for us. A farmer ploughs and someone separates the grain from the straw. They both do so because they hope for a share in the harvest.* **v11** *We have planted spiritual seed among you. We expect from you some of the things that we need. I suppose that it is not too much to expect that.* **v12a** *Other people have the right to receive help from you. Then we should have even more right to do so.*

Verses 7-8 The example in verses 1-6 could mean that his right to receive help was because of his position in the church. Paul mentions important apostles. He makes it clear that their right to receive help was because they spread the gospel. So he had the same right. A person deserves a reward for his work. He used the examples of a soldier, a farmer and a person who looks after sheep. They all expected a reward for their work. Paul was Christ's soldier in the war against Satan. He was like a farmer because he was spreading the gospel like seed. He was like a person who looked after sheep because he was looking after God's people. The Bible often compares God's people with sheep (Acts 20:28).

Verses 8-9 Someone in Corinth might say that these examples were nothing to do with God's work. So Paul also used words from the Law. In Deuteronomy 25:4, there is a law about animals that were working on a farm. A male cow is called an ox. It would drag a wooden board with nails in it over grain. The nails would separate the grain from the straw. The ox must not have anything over its mouth to stop it from eating some of the grain. If God cares about animals, he must care about people as well.

Verses 10-11 The farmer who ploughs expects to receive a reward for his work. So does the person who prepares the grain. Paul had acted like a farmer because he spread the gospel like seed in Corinth. They had received a spiritual harvest by becoming Christians. So it was normal for Paul and other people to expect to receive things that they needed for physical life.

Verse 12a Other apostles had the right to receive help. Paul may mean Apollos and Peter. Paul had spread the gospel in Corinth. Therefore, he had an even greater right to receive help from them.

Two more reasons for help 9:12b-14

v12b *But we did not use this right. Instead, we accept any difficulties rather than prevent the good news from spreading.* **v13** *You must know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple. Also those who serve at the altar share in the offering on the altar.* **v14** *In the same way, those who preach the good news should receive enough to live on from their work.*

Verse 12b Paul begins to say that he did not use the right that he had spoken about in verses 1-12a. Then he thinks of two more reasons why he has the right to receive financial help.

Verse 13 1. Priests in the Jewish temple and in pagan temples get part of what people offer on the altar.

Verse 14 2. Paul uses Jesus' words when he sent out the 70 disciples. Jesus told them not to take money with them. They should let people invite them into their homes. That is because 'the worker deserves his wages' (Luke 10:7). This was not a command. It was probably a well-known sentence.

Why Paul did not ask for help 9:15-18

v15 But I have not used any of these rights. And I do not hope that you will do such things for me. That is not why I am writing this. I would rather die than let anyone take away my pride in my work. v16 I preach the good news. But I cannot praise myself when I do so. I have to preach it. I would be very miserable if I did not spread the good news. v17 If I chose to preach, I could expect to receive a reward. But I have to preach because God has chosen me. So I am only doing my duty. v18 I have the satisfaction to preach the gospel free of charge. I can preach but not use my rights. That is my reward.

Verse 15 Paul had worked for himself when he went to Corinth. He had used his skill to make tents and other leather goods (Acts 18:3). When he was in Thessalonica, he had worked. He worked so that he would not make things hard for the people there (1 Thessalonians 2:9). He had also provided for himself so that lazy Christians could see the right way to live (2 Thessalonians 3:8).

In Corinth, he did not want people to think that he was teaching in order to become rich. Also, there were people who might have helped him for the wrong reason. It would be a way to gain honour for themselves. While Paul was in Thessalonica, he had received gifts from the Christians in Philippi. It seems from 2 Corinthians 11:7-9 that the Christians at Corinth discovered this. And they were not pleased when they discovered it.

Verse 16 Paul was like Jeremiah. Jeremiah said that God's message was like a fire inside him (Jeremiah 20:9). Even if he wanted to, Paul could not stop preaching. To stop would have made him miserable.

Verse 17 Paul might have expected a reward if he had chosen to preach. But he had no choice, because God had trusted him with

this work. So he was only carrying out his responsibility.

Verse 18 His reward was to receive no reward! People do not have to pay for their salvation. Eternal life is God's gift. So, when he refused to accept pay, Paul was acting the message of the gospel. He was showing that he was free to choose not to make them pay.

Paul's freedom 9:19-23

v19 I am free and I do not belong to anyone. But I make myself a slave to everyone. I do so to win as many as possible to Christ. v20 To the Jews, I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those with the law, I became like someone with the law. (Although I myself am not under the law.) v21 There are those who do not have the law. To those people, I became like someone who does not have the law. (I am not free from God's law. I am under Christ's law.) v22 To those who are weak, I became weak. That was to win the weak. I have become all things to all people. This is so that in all possible ways I might save some. v23 I do all these things because of the gospel. I want to share in its blessings.

Verse 19 Paul had shown that he had a right to receive help. But he was free not to accept it. He is free to do what he feels to be right in other situations too. He shows that now. This freedom is always so that he can help the gospel to spread.

Paul was free to act as he decided. But he thought about himself as everyone's slave. His purpose was to win people to be followers of Christ. He described four different groups of people:

1. Jews (verse 20). Paul did not believe that circumcision was essential. He refused to let anyone circumcise Titus (Galatians 2:3). But in a different situation, Paul circumcised

Timothy. (Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father.) Timothy was going to work with Paul and Silas. So it was necessary for him to be allowed into Jewish synagogues. This was where they usually began to preach the gospel (Acts 16:3).

Later, Paul returned to Jerusalem. Then James asked him to take part in a religious promise that four men were making. This was to show that Paul did not expect Jews to give up all their religious practices (Acts 21:23-26). So Paul agreed with some Jewish customs. But he taught that these customs were not necessary for salvation.

2. Those with the law. These words usually meant 'Jews'. But Paul was not speaking about a person's nationality. He was speaking about the person's attitude to the law. Paul may mean Gentiles who were interested in the Jewish religion. Or he may mean Gentiles who had believed the Jewish faith.

3. Those who do not have the law (verse 21). Paul here refers to pagans. The Christians at Corinth might misunderstand what Paul said. They might think that he was saying, 'I am free to behave in a wicked way.' So, he explained that he was not free from God's commands. Christ's law was the law of love towards other people (John 13:34-35). Paul's speeches at Lystra (Acts 14:14-17) and Athens (Acts 17:22-31) show how Paul tried to explain the gospel. He chose to talk in a way that those without the law would understand.

4. The weak (verse 22). Paul meant all those who had no power in society. Some people were anxious about meat that someone had offered to an idol. He included those people. He would give up his own freedom to eat it if this might cause them to sin.

Verses 22-23 Paul tried to understand all kinds of people. When he acted differently with some people, it was to help them to

become Christians. He was not hiding his true character. His great desire was to use every opportunity to spread the gospel. Paul hoped to share in the blessings of the gospel. He wanted everyone else to share in its blessings too.

Christians should control themselves 9:24-27

v24 You must know that in a race all the runners run. But only one gets the prize. Run in such a way as to get the prize. v25 Everyone who competes in the games trains himself strictly. They do it to get a crown that will not last. We do it to get a crown that will last for ever. v26 So I do not run as if I were uncertain. I do not fight like a man who hits the air. v27 No, I beat my body and I make it my slave. I do not want to lose the prize after I have preached to other people. That is why I do this to my body.

Verses 24-25 Paul knew about the games at Isthmia near Corinth. They happened every two years. Paul was in Corinth on one of these occasions. The games happened every two years in a pagan temple. There were great numbers of visitors and they had to live in tents. So, Paul was able to use his trade. And he knew what happened. Those who took part in the games had to train hard for about ten months before the event. Christians must be as serious as someone who is training himself. They must control their desires to live an easy life. The reward for a winner in the games was a crown that people made from a wild plant's leaves. However, these leaves soon died. They must learn to control their desires to live an easy life. But Christians look forward to an eternal reward. It will not be a reward that lasts only for a very short time.

Verses 26-27 A runner has to keep his attention on the line at the end. A man who

boxes must not waste his efforts. He must aim at the one that he is fighting. Christians must remember that they are aiming for heaven. Nothing should take their attention away from their eternal home.

Paul spoke about the way that he trained. 'Beat' is a word from boxing which means

'give a black eye to'. Paul meant that he controlled his own body. He made a great effort. He was the master of his body. Paul practised what he preached. His fear was not that he might lose his salvation. But he might fail to satisfy his Lord and then he would lose his 'crown'. By this, he probably meant his reward in heaven.

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