

First Corinthians
Chapter Nine
Leon Combs, Ph.D.
Begun September 15, 2007

Paul shows that he practices what he preaches.

1Cor 9:1 “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?”

1Cor 9:2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”

Paul had some problems with people accepting that he was an Apostle but certainly the Corinthians should not question his authority because they represent the fruit of his works for the Lord. He has been set free from his bondage to sin when he was crucifying the Lord again by his actions against the church.

1. He has been appointed an apostle by Jesus.

Acts 9:11 “And the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,”

*Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;
Acts 9:16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake. ”*

2. He also saw Jesus

Acts 9:4 “and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Acts 9:5 And he said, “Who art Thou, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,”

3. He also had special heavenly revelations:

2Cor 12:2 “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago-- whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

2Cor 12:3 And I know how such a man-- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows--

2Cor 12:4 was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.”

So Paul was certainly qualified by God’s standards to be called an Apostle.

**1Cor 9:3 “My defense to those who examine me is this:
1Cor 9:4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink?
1Cor 9:5 Do 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?
1Cor 9:6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?
1Cor 9:7 Who 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?
1Cor 9:8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?
1Cor 9:9 For 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?
1Cor 9:10 Or 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.”**

He is now telling them of his qualifications to receive payment for his labors. He gives several examples of which they would all be familiar. In verse five he is not talking about having a wife but of having a wife come with the missionaries on travels related to their work for the Lord. Such an application also applies today in that not only should the missionaries receive pay for the time they are on missionary trips but they should also receive pay to help support their wives. While on a mission trip they should not have to be concerned with anything other than proclaiming the Gospel.

**1Cor 9:11 “If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?
1Cor 9:12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.
1Cor 9:13 Do 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 with the altar?
1Cor 9:14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”
1Cor 9:15 “But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things that it may 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.”**

He told them that even the Temple priests ate of the meat left over from the sacrifices. Even though he has every right to expect them to support him in his missionary efforts he would rather die than to have anyone think less of him for receiving the support. We should today properly take care of the material needs of our pastors.

1Cor 9:16 “For 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.

1Cor 9:17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

1Cor 9:18 What 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.”

Paul has a command to preach the gospel and those today with gifts such as for teaching must also proclaim the gospel. I have a charge to teach and certainly it is woe to me if I do not teach. I can identify somewhat with Paul in this mandate. Jeremiah had a similar drive to speak for the Lord:

Jer 20:9 “But if I say, “I will not remember Him Or speak anymore in His name,” Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding it in, And I cannot endure it.”

Although there are no Apostles today, all Christians have the duty to proclaim the truth about Jesus Christ. When we do not witness for Him, there may be woes awaiting us also. Paul is saying in verse 17 that he is a steward of the message about Jesus and he must do it whether voluntarily or not. But he is voluntarily telling the Gospel message and so he is due a reward according to God’s rules. However he is willing to forego any material gain so that he can serve His Lord.

1Cor 9:19 “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.”

In this series of sentences Paul continues to clarify his primary position of winning people to the Lord. Of course he, and we, know that nobody saves anyone or wins anyone to the Lord because becoming a child of God is not having the philosophy and rules properly spelled out so that we can then obey them and become a child of God. But Paul wants more than anything else to be used of the Lord in the winning of people to the Kingdom. Anyone who has been involved in such a process knows the incredible joy of being used by the Lord in bringing someone into the Kingdom. He wanted all to understand that Jesus represents the end of the value of the Law:

Rom 10:4 “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

We are now under grace:

Rom 6:14 “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.”

He now begins to talk about three categories of people to whom he serves.

1. The Jews

1Cor 9:20 “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, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law;”

When he says that he became a Jew, he is saying that he respected their scruples. Of course he was a Jew but he wanted to get them to understand that none of their works are of any value before the Lord.

2. The Gentiles

1Cor 9:21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law.”

In talking about those not under the Law he is referring to the Gentiles. He is saying that he rids himself of all pride and only wants to be able to properly represent the Gospel message to all people. Of course he never became a sinner but he identified with the people as much as possible to help them understand the Gospel message. His presentation would be different depending upon the background of the people to whom God has sent him. Again I must emphasize that cleverness of presentation is not a guarantee of “winning” someone to the Lord. Only God can cause someone to be born again. But He has provided us the answers to questions from His chosen people so that when we speak properly to them they recognize the word of the Lord and not our word.

3. The New Christians

1Cor 9:22 “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.

1Cor 9:23 And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

Here when he says that he might win the weak, he is referring to establishing these new Christians in the faith so that they will be strong to face the world. The gospel was of foremost importance to Paul, as it should be for all of us, so he judged his behavior by it’s teachings. He did not want to be a partaker of the world but of the Kingdom.

1Cor 9:24 “Do 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.

1Cor 9:25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

1Cor 9:26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

1Cor 9:27 but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

Athletic contests were common in this time and place for the isthmian games were held every two years in Corinth. Because people would be very familiar with the vocabulary of the games, Paul frequently used these athletic analogies. Although the parallel with the athletic contests is not complete because many people are saved, not just the one who does the most for the Kingdom, he still uses it to try to encourage the Christians to always give their best in their service to their Lord. Professional athletes use great discipline in

their lives so as to be prepared to give of their best to their sport. These athletes receive only a temporary reward but Christians receive an eternal reward. With such a greater reward awaiting us we should be even more disciplined in our service for Jesus than the greatest athlete is in his service to his event. Not only should we deprive ourselves of any sinful activities, we should also limit our participation in lawful practices that might hinder our service to the Lord. I watched a race one time where a runner misunderstood where the race ended. Although he was ahead at that point, he lost the race because he slowed down too soon. A boxer may shadow box in practice but that will not win a match. Paul knows that the end of his time here will come whenever the Lord so decrees so he gives of himself totally as long as he is able.

He ends this section by saying that he disciplines his body to the extreme. He is not saying that the physical body is evil for that is not the Christian philosophy. However he knows that all evil comes from the human heart and everyone must discipline themselves to minimize that effect.

Matt 15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders."

Paul realized that he would be fighting this battle as long as he was physically present:

Rom 7:15 "For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

Rom 7:16 But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good.

Rom 7:17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me.

Rom 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

Rom 7:19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.

Rom 7:20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

Rom 7:21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good.

Rom 7:22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

Rom 7:23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."

Paul also knew that the Lord understood this struggle and He had provided the antidote:

Rom 7:24 "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

Rom 7:25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

He ends this chapter by saying something that some people interpret as saying that he could lose his salvation. He is not saying that at all. He is saying that if he does not do all that he can to serve the Lord to his fullest capabilities he might lose some of his rewards. He had earlier discussed this loss of reward:

1Cor 3:14 "If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward.

1Cor 3:15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

References

1. "The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians", John MacArthur, Moody Press, 1984.
2. "1 Corinthians", Leon Morris, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 1985.
3. "1&2 Corinthians", Charles Hodge, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974.
4. "The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 10, 1 Corinthians", Regency Reference Library, 1976.