

1 Corinthians 9:1-27

“Laying Aside My Liberty”

Here in the United States we're basically groomed as a culture to understand that we have certain *rights*. and We're taught to stand up for our rights, and not to let anyone take away our rights. The 2nd sentence found in the Declaration of Independence begins like this, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable *Rights*,” the Constitution of the United states had amended to it what? A Bill of *Rights*, it goes against everything that has been ingrained with in us as American citizens to be asked to *give up* our rights.

Yet here in 1st Cor Ch 9 that's exactly what the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul is challenging us to do. Now don't misunderstand me this Ch isn't concerned with our Constitution, or the Bill of Rights, it's not coming against a particular establishment of government. But what this Ch *is* concerned with is the general health and well being of our brothers and sisters in Christ and that we be willing to lay aside the liberty that we may have in Christ if it'll either A.) Help facilitate the environment that may lead to one coming to *know* the Lord; or B.) Facilitate an atmosphere that will promote one's *growth* in the Lord. **Our primary objective as believers is not to stand up for our rights, or not to let anyone take away our rights. In Christ we've been called to deny ourselves, take up our cross (that instrument of death to self, and the self will) and follow after Him. (That is walk as He walked, pattern our lives after His.)** Our chief objective (outside of knowing Him personally) is that others come to *know* Him and once they know Him that they continue to *grow in* Him. and If it takes laying aside a bit of my liberty in order to foster those things, than so be it. That's to be the heart of the child of God. As we quote from time to time around here we read in the book of Philippians, “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,*” Phil 2:3-5

So our responsibility to love one another takes priority over my liberty in Christ; you recall the context here. Paul has been teaching us that we can be wrong, even if we're in the right. We may be completely right in a certain position we take regarding a particular practice that we want to partake in, but be completely wrong in our attitude towards our brother or sister in it because we're not walking in love. Which is to say that if what I want to do (even though it's not sin) somehow hurts, hinders, or stumbles my brother or my sister in Christ and yet I insist on having my way anyway; though I may be right, I'm completely in the wrong. Because instead of promoting an atmosphere of compassion, being sensitive to the weakness of my bro/sister, I'm resolutely demanding my rights. **and I don't care if it hurts you, harms you, hinders you, or anything else because it's not about you, it's about me. and That (my friends) flies in the face of everything Christ in my life stands for, now I've sinned against them and in so doing I've sinned against Christ.**

So what am I to do? I'm to walk in sensitivity towards the situation I find myself in, not insisting on my way, but considering you 1st. So that if going to the movie theatre is something that is a real struggle *for* you, and nothing but sin *to* you. Than when we're together I'm never going to bring up the possibility of going to a movie, or tell you about the latest show I've seen or anything else.

I'm not going to harass you, or try to change you, why? It's non-essential, it's not a matter of being more spiritual if you go to a movie, or don't go to a movie. But I'm not going to try and convince that it's ok to go to a movie.

As for your part, you're not going to try and condemn me, or guilt me, or make me feel less spiritual because you know I took my kids to see, "Over the hedge." We're just going to walk in love towards one another, and let the Lord work out the non-essential areas of conviction in our lives.

Now in Ch 9 Paul continues with this principle of dying to self in order to promote an atmosphere that may lead to someone coming to know the Lord, or to help them grow in the Lord. and He does so by demonstrating and illustrating how this has applied to his own life personally. He's not saying, "Hey give up your rights, but I'm going to walk in mine." He's speaking from a position of personal experience, and here's just a few ways that he's done this same thing, even for them, notice.

Vs1-2

Now I'm going to tell you straight out so that you're prepared for what lies ahead, what Paul is going to point out is that he has the *right* to be paid for preaching the gospel. and That it's proper to pay those who minister spiritually. and He's going to make his case very powerfully, and quite pointedly. and It's important that that principle be concretely established or else the fact that he gave up that right for their greater good makes no difference. So I don't want you to start squirming over the fact that we're talking about preachers getting paid, it's just where we're at in scripture. Believe me its more difficult for me to share it, than it is for you to hear it. But when you go through the entirety of the Word of God (which we do) this is just part of it. Some twist it, and pervert it for their own gain and that makes it difficult for all of us, nevertheless that doesn't somehow negate the validity of the proper understanding of it, and that's all we want.

and So he begins by basically establishing his credentials, he asks a series of rhetorical questions that have an obvious answer implied so that he can get us on that same plane of understanding that he's coming from. He says, "Am I not an apostle?" The answer is, "Yes, Paul you're an apostle." The Word apostle means, "One sent out." Paul was personally sent, divinely commissioned by Jesus Himself on the Road to Damascus when the resurrected Christ appeared to him. "Am I not free?" Don't I have rights and liberties just like you?, "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord." One of the prerequisites for being an apostle was having seen the risen Lord. and Then to further underscore the legitimacy of the Lord's stamp on his ministry he points to the work God did through him in their own city, they're the direct byproduct of God's work in his life. and So he says, "Hey, even if other perhaps question my apostolic authority, there's no way that you legitimately can, you've seen God's work in my life up close and personal. You're the seal, I mean the proof of God's work in my life is right there before you, the church itself." Paul was instrumental in planting the church in Corinth, before he came to town the city was completely given over to pagan practices and idolatry. So, "Am I an apostle?" Yes. "Am I free?" Yes. "Have I seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" Yes. "Are you my work in the Lord?" Yes. and The point that he's leading up to is that as an apostle and spiritual overseer in their lives, he has certain rights, things that he might expect as the result of that.

Vs3-6

So having established his credentials, he begins to build his case. and He says, “My defense to those who examine me is this:” and Those words, “defense,” and “examine,” are legal words, words that would be used in a court of law. It’s as if he’s on trial here regarding his rights. and The rights that he brings to their attention are those of not only having his needs met personally, but also the fact that that same care should extend to his family, and that the ministry is rightly viewed as something that is demanding of full time salary.

You see there in Vs 4 where he says, (read). He’s not saying, “We have a right to a meal now and then don’t we?” No one is questioning the basic human need to survive, he’s saying that he has a right to eat and drink at the expense of those to whom he ministers, the church. and He says that not only does that right, or liberty extend to him personally, but it would also apply to the minister’s family. That’s what Vs 5 is getting at, that he can expect that should he bring along a wife (which we know he wasn’t married but it’s the principle he’s getting at) (and notice he qualifies again a “believing” wife, believers aren’t to go out and marry non-believers), that support should extend to meet the needs of his family. Notice he says that when the other apostles, or the brothers of the Lord (James, Joses, Judas, and Simon), or Peter goes out to minister, or goes on a missionary journey, that they would bring their wife. and They received support enough to take care of themselves and their family from the churches to which they ministered. (and By the way, you might note that Peter was married, we see it Matt 8, Mark and Luke mention it as well. Because our Catholic friends claim that Peter was the 1st pope, and since the Catholic priesthood resides in a vow of celibacy that tends to throw a wrinkle in things. Because if he was the 1st pope, which he wasn’t, he was a married pope.) and In Vs 6 he points out the fact that one who’s been called by God to a life of ministry, should be supported as such vocationally and shouldn’t have to work outside of the ministry to try and support themselves if at all possible, that is if the provision is there to support them.

But Paul and Barnabas freely relinquished that right, so that they might not be seen in the light of only preaching the gospel for money. and You’d have thought that’d have gained them a higher line of respect. Instead it was like, “You see, there’s obviously an issue there because if they were truly called, or if Paul was *truly* an apostle he’d be supported in his ministry.” But Paul is pointing out that he’s not support, not because he doesn’t have that right (and he did occasionally receive support from other places) but he refused the support from them so that it wouldn’t inhibit his sharing the gospel with them. You think we have charlatans out there today, we do, but in Paul’s day there were people all over the place trying to turn a buck in the name of some “god.” All these pagan priests, and various religious racketeers everywhere, all the more in the city of Corinth where there were temples and idols littered all over the place. and Paul was careful not to get lumped in with that sort of thing. Now that doesn’t mean that his right wasn’t legit, it just means that he wanted to bless them and keep them from getting their signals crossed as it pertained to his motives.

But Paul points out that that kind of thing is the exception, not the norm, it makes both secular, and scriptural sense, it’s common to the culture of man that when someone is working, they deserve a just wage, the ministry being no exception.

Vs7

So you see common customs teach us that when you labor, you should expect to reap the rewards *of* that labor. You don't train for war and then the government say, "Ok, go buy an M-16, a 50 cal. and some grenades and we'll send you up." *They take care of you, provide for you, the soldier is taken care of, so is the vine-dresser, if you plant a vineyard you have the liberty to partake of it's fruit, and the shepherd, what shepherd tends to a flock and doesn't drink of it's milk? So Paul is saying that it's only right that as a good soldier of Jesus Christ and one laboring in the field of God's harvest, and an under-shepherd over the flock of God, that the means of his labor should provide for his needs.* We read in the Prov, "*Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, And attend to your herds; For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown endure to all generations. When the hay is removed, and the tender grass shows itself, And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in, The lambs will provide your clothing, And the goats the price of a field; You shall have enough goats' milk for your food, For the food of your household, And the nourishment of your maidservants.*" Prov 27:23-27 So as you tend to the flock, the right to have your family supported generously *by* the flock is there. Now notice that Paul says, "Look, I'm not just making this up, or drawing on the secular principles of this world, it's also a scriptural principle of the Word of God."

Vs8-10

and As you know the word "hope" found in the scriptures is more than wishful thinking, it's a guaranteed certainty and a concrete reality. So that when someone is working hard (in this case in the ministry) in his heart and mind there is a guaranteed certainty that he'll be taken care of accordingly. and Paul quotes from Duet 25:4 to support his point scripturally, and it seems that that phrase was a proverb of that day and the general meaning of "Don't muzzle an ox while he treads out grain," is "Hey, when a guy is working for you, pay him." Kinda like when we say, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," we're not generally implying a literal dog in the situation. *and When you read Duet 25 you'll find that it has nothing to do with animals and everything to do with human relationships. and Then this phrase is thrown in there, and the idea is that it's not a good idea to starve the person who's working and preparing your meals. If you're wanting someone to cook gourmet meals for you all the time, but you're not letting him eat as a general rule, and when you do it's ramen noodles and macaroni, it's going to eventually wear on him physically, emotionally, psychologically, the whole bit.* You want nothing but the best *from* him, but you're not willing to give anything but the worst or bear minimum *to* him, and over time that'll be detrimental to both you *and* him. He needs that hope that you'll take care of him if he's doing his best for you.

Vs11

You see he's saying, "Which is really the greater service? Who's really giving the more? Compared to the eternal aspects of God's Word, and the things that will make for your spiritual health and continued growth, the reaping of temporal support in return is but a small thing." When he was writing to the Romans about a contribution he was taking to Jerusalem from some Gentile churches he said in regards to their giving, "*It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.*" Rom 15:27 To the Galatians he put it like this, "*Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.*" Gal 6:6

This wasn't a concept that they were unfamiliar with, others were receiving their support, be it perhaps Apollos, or another teacher there in Corinth. and Paul says if these guys deserve your support, how much more do we having planted and established the work there?

Vs12

and that's the bottom line heart of the apostle and the overall point he's seeking to secure. Do what you need to do in order that you don't hinder the gospel of Christ. I'm to be willing to lay aside my right, my liberty, that which I perhaps have the authority to be apart of, if it will help foster someone coming to know the Lord, or if it will help them to grow in the Lord. Paid or not paid is really not the issue, people coming to know and grow in Christ *is*. Paul says, "Sure I deserve to be paid, have the right to be paid, but if it'll cloud the issue at hand, or be a distraction from your ability to receive, forget it, freely I've received, and freely I'm willing to give." But notice he continues to drive home the fact that as far as his rights go, it's not even a grey area, a questionable thing, it's literally his "God given right" the scriptures declare it.

Vs13-14

Both in the OT, the priests (those who ministered to the spiritual needs of the people) were supported through the tithes and offering of the people (and God set it up to where in reality they'd be supported really well). and In the NT, Jesus reaffirms the same principle commanding that those who preach the gospel should live *from* the gospel.

Where did the Lord command that? Matt 10:7-10, and again in Luke Ch 10 when in instructing His disciples to go into the fields of the kingdom laboring for the harvest. and In speaking of traveling to various places He said, "*And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages.*" Luke 10:7 Translation: "Let those whom you minister to, take care of you, and provide for you."

Vs15-16

So Paul says, "I have usurped none of my rights to be supported from the gospel, and I'm not writing this to drop a hint, I'd rather die than have you think it's about me getting paid. The fact is that money or no money I can't not preach the gospel, woe is me if I *don't* preach the gospel." This was Paul's burden, he'd been called to teach and preach God's Word, he couldn't not do it if he tried. Like Jeremiah, finding himself in a dungeon, mistreated, unappreciated, generally mocked and abused, made fun of because he served the Lord. and He said, "*I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name. ' But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not.*" Jer 20:9 God's Word just burned in him, he couldn't not share it, couldn't hold it in if he tried, that's the way Paul felt about it, how do you feel about it? **What's the burden of your heart as it pertains to God's Word? Could you take it or leave it? Share it or sit tight and say nothing about it, either way doesn't really matter? God help us that His Word might burn like fire in us, that even if we tried to hold it back we'd be weary of fighting it and unable to keep silent. Paul had a burden, the love of Christ compelled him, constrained him, motivated and moved him, he had to share the gospel.**

Vs17-18

In Vs 17 Paul is saying that if he relinquishes his right to be paid willingly he has a reward, but if he doesn't get paid against his will than he'd see it as being entrusted with a stewardship, managing God's affairs. But the point here is that he did so willingly, it wasn't a career choice for him, having to do with money, it was a calling. **and Even though he received wages from other churches from time to time he didn't do that with the Corinthians. (Again with all religious racketeering going on in and around Corinth Paul was careful to avoid that appearance). What then was his reward for laying aside his right to be paid? Vs18, His reward was the joy of being able to give the gospel freely, freely he'd received, and freely he would give.** and That is so God's heart, it wasn't about what he could get, but what he had to *give*. Because he wanted to see people coming to Christ. and Again you guys this is the whole crux of this Ch, being willing to lay aside my rights in order to encourage people in Christ. Check it out

Vs19-23

Notice that twice in the section he tells us that the motive for him doing what he does is that he might win the more to Christ, he does what he does for the gospel's sake, so that he might have an in road to impart Christ to people. He's free to do whatever, so what he's chosen to do is become the servant of all. That is, to adapt to whatever circumstance he finds himself in that he might build a bridge to share the gospel. He says that to the Jews he became a Jew. Or to understand that another way, "When I'm around those who don't understand that the ordinances of the law are irrelevant, I go ahead and observe them with them, because it doesn't make a difference. My righteousness isn't found there whether observe a feast, or don't observe a feast, but if in observing a feast with this guy it'll gain me a platform of respect so that he'll be open to listening to me about Jesus, than I'll do it." **To those who are with out the law (or Gentiles) as with out the law, now he qualifies that, remember there's always a qualifying context to the liberty we have in Christ. and He's careful to make sure that we understand that he never violated the sanctity of his relationship with Jesus.**

He didn't go out and party with the partiers to share Christ in the circle as the joint was being passed around, or over a 12 pack of beer, that's not what he's saying. He's simply saying that the Gentiles didn't observe the ordinances of the law, they were with out law. **and The law isn't what made for his righteousness, so when with the Gentiles if it'd make an inroad to share Christ if he came over for pork loin on a Saturday, than so be it, not a problem. To the one who struggled with inconsequential matters, he just met them where they were at. and That's the bottom line, he would meet people where they were at, he was sensitive to their needs, and it was always for the same reason, that people might come to know and grow in Christ.**

To an outside observer his life might seem inconsistent, but the fact is that his life was incredibly consistent, he always had 1 goal, leading people to, sharing *with them* and showing *to them* Jesus. and Here's what I want you to see, his focus wasn't on his rights, or on his liberty, his focus was on his objective. **Focus on the goal, the objective, the overall ambition, and do what you need to do (under God obviously) to achieve it. His goal was seeing people saved, then watering them that they might grow in the Lord. So if in order to achieve that he had to tighten the reigns in his life a bit, or relax his approach (as long as it didn't go against balanced understanding of God's Word) than that's what he did. His aim wasn't set on his prerogative, but upon his objective.**

Vs24-27

What's the idea here? That there's always a discipline involved in the life of one who wants to excel. and When you have an objective you do well to go all out in order to achieve it. and He uses the imagery of sports here because sports were huge in Paul's day, especially to the Corinthians because the Isthmian games which were held every 2 years and 2nd in prestige only to the Olympics were conducted right outside of Corinth. **and He's still with in the context of being willing to lay aside our rights when necessary in order to excel in what God has called us to do. You couldn't compete in the Isthmian games unless you were of Greek citizenship and could prove that you'd been in training for at least 10 months, the last month you would be on sight under close scrutiny of your rigorous training schedule.**

and He says, "Look at these guys, do they have a right to say...sleep in, in the morning? Sure they do, but they forego that right, do they have a right to say... have a big piece of pie, or gorge out on junk food? You bet, but they don't do that, how about their work out, do they have the right to not even run, or do sit ups, or push ups, or weight training? They don't have to do any of that, but they forego that right, why? Because they want to win." **They have their sights set on objective and they're willing to discipline themselves vigorously, laying aside their rights if it'll help them to achieve their overall objective.**

and What's that objective, a wreath placed on their head that will wilt in about a day and a half. A perishable crown, and Paul says, "But we do what we do to obtain an imperishable crown, a crown of glory that will not fade away, eternal in the heavens to the glory of Jesus Christ" Now if they'll buffet themselves, discipline themselves, scrutinize themselves, for such a temporal result, how much more should we forfeit a few rights in the light of how that will result for you eternally? **Don't sluff off in your love relationship with Jesus Christ Don't let your rights rule you, don't be governed by what you get to do, rather than subjecting yourself to what your body wants to do, subject your body to what your spirit says you should do. Lest having preached to others we ourselves become disqualified. What's that mean? Well, he's not speaking about a loss of salvation, you don't lose your citizenship if you're disqualified from the games, but you're no longer a contender for the prize.**

The bible says that there will be those who are ashamed at the Lord's appearing, saved "Yes" but having been rendered ineffective in their service to the Lord. So keep your rights with in the proper perspective, lest in demanding them at all cost, they cost you, they cost me, we become ineffective in our service to Christ. We want to help people in their relationship with the Lord, not hinder them.

Prayer Points:

God help us, that we might be an effective tool in Your hands, not one that You have to set on the shelf being rendered no longer operative, no longer able to be of service having disqualified ourselves through selfish ambition. Teach us to live in subjection to the Spirit, that we not be ruled over by the flesh, cause us to be salt and light in this dark and dying world. and Lord what an example you've given us in Paul, being free from all, yet having made himself a servant to all that You might just glorify Yourself and draw people to Yourself through his life. Mature us Lord, help us to grow more and more, dying to self, that others might see You, come to know You, and continue to grow *in* You.

and You know what? Jesus is the ultimate example in giving up His rights for the sake of others. He laid aside His rights to the point of death, even the death of the cross that we might receive the forgiveness of sins. and If you don't know Christ, have never surrendered your heart *to* Christ, than I want to extend to you an opportunity to do that right now. I don't care how upright and moral you may consider yourself, or how degraded, deprived, or sinful you may think you are. **Apart from Christ none are righteous, no not one, there is none who understands, there are none who seek after God. But let me tell you that God is seeking you out today, your morals won't get you into heaven, because morality is a relative thing. You may be a great guy/gal, but compared to who?** Maybe compared to me you shine, the problem is that I'm not the standard, Jesus Christ is the standard, the standard is absolute perfection, not only outwardly, but inwardly in the heart. God is searching the motives and attitudes of your heart/my heart. and That's where we all fall so radically short, our hearts are wickedly deceitful. But Christ stands at the door of your heart and He knocks, and if you'll open the door, He'll come in and forgive you of all your sin, making you white like snow. All you have to do is ask.