

LIBERATED YET CAPTIVATED

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
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Let's Begin

In chapters 8-10, Paul shows the Corinthians how to solve the question of meat offered to idols. By doing so, he instructs modern believers how to solve matters of right and wrong when no clear command may be evident from Scripture. We discovered the valuable use of Biblical principles that guide every believer through the moral fog that falls on him or her in everyday life.

Paul remains clear concerning the liberty Christians possess in Jesus Christ. Through His death, we have been set free from the law of sin and death. Nothing binds us. We are perfectly free in the Lord Jesus.

Nonetheless, our liberty in Christ does not imply a lack of love for others. To the contrary, our liberty is always tempered by love for other people. Later in the letter, the Apostle can say, "though I have all knowledge...and have not love, I am nothing" (13:2). In fact, Paul makes it clear that we may judge our spiritual maturity by the way we use our freedom.

As an example of the Christian's "liberated yet captivated" status, Paul pulls an example from his own circumstances. Thus, note the simple outline below as we consider Paul's restriction of his freedom for the sake of other people:

- I. Paul's Defense to Receive Support for Ministry (vv. 1-14)**
- II. Paul's Decision to Renounce Support for Ministry (vv. 15-27)**

I. Paul's Defense to Receive Support for Ministry (vv. 1-14)

Paul opens the chapter with a series of rhetorical questions, "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. Mine answer to them that do examine me is this," (1 Cor. 9:1-3). Indeed the questions continue through verse 8. One key in understanding Paul's perspective is the word "answer" (v. 3). The word is *apologia* which means "a speech in defense" or a "vindication." The term was widely used in the legal system by defense lawyers who spoke on behalf of the accused.

Critics were charging Paul with pillaging the church of God by taking support for ministry. Like a defense attorney before a court, Paul argues the case for supporting those who live only to preach the Gospel.

First, Paul offers an *explanation* (vv. 1-6). Four questions are asked in these verses. Initially, Paul queries concerning his apostolic call. Christ Himself had commissioned him into Gospel service. While having no intention of preaching what he believed to be heresy, a vision from the Lord Jesus changed Paul forever (Acts 9). The Corinthians experienced his apostolic gifts first-hand, "for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord" (v. 3).

In addition, the Apostle Paul insisted upon not only his marital rights but also his material rights. He asks, "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" (1 Cor. 9:5-6). Family matters were high on Paul's list because family matters were high on God's list.

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No one called of the Gospel may forfeit his responsibilities to care for his family. Nor may a husband abandon his marital duties to pursue a call in ministry. Some men have unfortunately sacrificed their wives for a so-called pursuit of following the Lord. However, if God calls a man to ministry, know He will affirm His call to His man in the heart of His man's wife!

Evidently, some Corinthians had leveled criticism against both Paul and Barnabas thinking they were milking the churches dry for support. Paul's point is simple: he had a right to devote full time to Kingdom work in God's church and be fully supported by the church. Christ Himself clearly affirmed ministerial support, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (v. 14; cp. also Luke 10:7). If God's servants are faithful to serve in His vineyard, they may expect to drink from His vineyard.

Reflection Connection

Take a moment and reflect on your church's support of your pastor. Do you think the church is sensitive to his needs? Spend a few moments in prayer for the pastor, his family, and his daily needs.

Sadly, there are churches today which do not take Paul's language seriously. While they may support their pastors "fulltime", the compensation is often inadequate and even begrudged by some people. Churches should count it an honor to take care of God's servant. Deacons would do well to keep those responsible for fiscal matters well informed concerning proper compensation for the pastor. No shepherd can properly feed his flock if he is perpetually worried about how he will make the mortgage payment. It is one thing if the pastor is not a good steward of his finances. It is quite another for a church to be uncaring and unsupportive of God's servant.

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Next, Paul offers an *illustration* (vv. 7-14). In fact, he uses many illustrations to defend the right to receive support.

First, he uses an illustration from *life*. He writes, "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" (v. 7). Paul employs three vivid pictures to demonstrate his point. He begins with a *soldier* who is supported by the government for which he fights. Our military should draw wages—honorable wages—for the freedom and protection they provide. He next uses a *sower* who eats from the grain he plants. Finally, he uses a *shepherd* who has the right to drink from the milk produced.

No more relevant images could be conceived to picture a pastor and the church. He protects the flock from false teaching. He sows the Word of God for spiritual sustenance. And, he tends the flock, tenderly caring for God's sheep. Hence, every pastor may rightly expect to be supported from the flock he serves.

Second, Paul uses an illustration from *law*. Note well his words, "Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (1 Cor. 9:8-10;



cp. Deut. 25:4; 1 Tim. 5:18). Frankly, it is inhumane not to allow an ox to eat the corn from the field it plows. Even so, if God is interested in animals' welfare and what is just for them, how much more is He interested in our welfare!

In addition, Paul makes an analogy to the priest of the Old Testament temple (vv. 13-14). Just as priests were fulltime servants of the Lord, so are His pastors of His churches. Thus, Paul summarizes the case he makes for receiving support from the ministry he serves.

II. Paul's Decision to Renounce Support for Ministry (vv. 15-27)

The case Paul makes is air-tight. Ministers of the Gospel live of the Gospel. Had Paul been before a court of law, no judge would have dismissed his defense. Nevertheless, Paul does a startling thing. As vigorously as he made his case point by point, he now completely renounces it!

Note carefully his words, "But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for *it were* better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel." (1 Cor. 9:15-18). What is the apostle attempting to do?

*First, Paul was renouncing all rights to support for the sake of his Savior. Recall Paul's concern about the "hindering" the Gospel (v. 12). The term translated "hinder", is *enkopē*, and it was used of the military who, upon the advancement of an opposing army in their city, would make slits in the street to hold them up. Paul wanted nothing to hold the Gospel up from being delivered to all peoples.*

Hence, Paul was literally saying he had no desire to preach for money (v. 18). Unfortunately, because airtime is so costly, television preachers usually spend an enormous amount of time raising money and little time actually teaching.

Furthermore, Paul simply could not live without preaching. He says, "woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" Imagine if that were the heartbeat of every pastor in the United States. Imagine if that were the heartbeat of every church

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Second, Paul renounced all right to support for the sake of sinners. He mentions a glorious paradox, “For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” (v. 19). Though no one had bondage over his soul, Paul was still in chains to the Gospel. Why? He viewed saved souls as “gain.”

Notice the Apostle mentioned what some have called compromise: “I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some” (v. 22). Was Paul compromising his moral and spiritual integrity? Was he two-faced? A child of the world and a saved saint? No! Paul’s meaning was simply that he would gladly speak the language of any group or person in order to share the Gospel with them. In essence, he was simply saying he looked for common ground to plug in the Gospel.

Sadly, some people take Paul completely out of his contextual meaning and read all sorts of foreign implications into his words. For example, some believe in order to reach the most degenerate sections of society, we must get down on their level and speak as they speak, even if their speech is filthy and unacceptable in mixed company. Those who attempt to read Paul in this way not only skew his meaning, but in many cases reveal a clear spiritual vacuum in their own lives.

While Jesus practiced the same principle as did Paul, it is unthinkable to imagine our Lord attempting to connect with people of other cultures by mimicking the most ungodly aspects of it. Jesus simply found people where they were and ministered to them as they were.

To the woman at the well, He accepted her as she came to Him. However, He did not fail to confront her about her sin (John 4:4-26). Also, to Nicodemis He gave both wisdom and an open hand. He accepted him for what he was—a sincere but lost religious zealot who was afraid to approach Jesus except by night. But Nicodemis’ remedy was not to be convinced of his cowardice; instead a new birth from above was his spiritual potion (John 3:3).

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Third, Paul renounced all right to support for the sake of self (vv. 24-27). Paul’s well never runs dry of metaphors and picture images. Now he draws from the Greek games. He writes, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (v. 24). One runner wins. That’s the name of the game. However, since every Christian is a runner, every Christian can be a winner! The point Paul is making concerns discipline and self-denial. After all, trained athletes were disciplined in strict diet, rigorous conditioning, and uncommon mental self-control. What better image to reflect the role of a follower of Jesus Christ who gave his to her life daily in pursuit of Him?

Reflection Connection

Take some time to reflect upon becoming what Paul calls “all things to all people” for the specific purpose of “saving some.” Ask yourself, “What would I do to share the Gospel with another person? What would I not do?”



Moreover, Paul offered another popular athletic sport—boxing. He writes, “so fight I, not as one that beateth the air” (v. 26b). The Apostle insisted he was not a shadow boxer, which ultimately was a waste of time. Training as a “shadow boxer” could only possess real meaning if the one who disciplines himself climbs into the ring and performs. So it is with the believer; a real battle is fought!

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul insists upon keeping his body and “bring into subjection” (v. 27). The term translated as the three-word phrase, “bring into subjection” is but one word in Greek—*doulagōgeō*. This term is the verb form of the same word translated “slave.” Paul conditioned his body, forcing it into servitude. A very rare word in the ancient world, it carried with it the complete lack of freedom. Hence, the Christian life is a life of self-denial, living for another Master, Jesus Christ.

Wrap Up

Gospel ministers are called to oversee God's churches. Consequently, those who live to minister the Gospel need make no apology for living from the Gospel. Paul made this very clear. On the other hand, Paul challenges everyone to develop a heart that never insists on claiming rights, but always lives on loving others. Every Christian should consider the flame that kept Paul's heart burning: “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!”

