

1Corinthians 9:7-14 "Supporting the Man of God"

1CO 9:7-11 "Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? 8 Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? 10 Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. 11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?"

Up to this point in chapter 9 Paul has identified certain rights or liberties he has as an apostle, some of which included the right to be supported by the church as it met his needs, as he describes it as food and drink in verse four.

Other rights he points out include taking a believing wife as did the other apostles along with the Lord's brothers. And of course the Lord's brothers would have been those half-brothers to Jesus since our Lord did not have an earthly father. Joseph would have been the father of these brothers.

We know that two of his brothers would have included James (Gal.1:19) and Jude, (Jud 1:1). Paul writes, "I saw none of the other apostles -only James, the Lord's brother." And then Jude writes in his epistle, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,...""

These two we are certain were believers. As to the rest we simply aren't given a clear indication as to their spiritual status, but would have included Joseph and Simon.

MAR 6:3 "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him."

And so, Jesus came from a relatively large family with at least 6 children being born to Mary, and possibly more if there were more than two sisters.

And so, Paul's point is that if the apostles, and even the Lord's brothers, who were serving in the Kingdom of God through faith in

Christ, can take along believing wives with them in their ministries, why not Paul and Barnabas who are also serving Christ exclusively as apostles?

Why is it, Paul says, that only Barnabas and I have to work for a living when the rest of the other apostles don't have to, as they are supported by the church?

Now Paul is not expressing sour grapes over this situation. In fact, he is actually supporting the other apostles in their right to devote themselves full time to the ministry. Paul is simply building his own case for not accepting financial help from the church even though he certainly deserves it as a laborer for Christ and the Corinthians.

And then he goes on to make an analogy that most of these people in Corinth would have understood. He uses three examples to show how when a person labors at a job they are expected to get paid for their labors.

1CO 9:7 "Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk?"

Paul is not asking these questions as though he really expects any answer. A soldier, for example, doesn't fight during the day, and then go home and work a night job to support his family because he's serving as a soldier for free.

A farmer who puts in countless hours tilling the soil and planting seed and watering those fields and tending to the plants, doesn't do it because he expects someone else to come in and cart away all of the fruit, leaving him nothing. He does it to be supported through his labors to produce a crop.

The same is true of a shepherd. What shepherd in his right mind would fend off wild animals and take the time to make sure each lamb or goat is accounted for while leading them all over God's creation to make sure they get watered and fed, if he has no intention of sharing in the benefits of his labors?

In these illustrations Paul is making the point that generally man does not expect any person who labors, to work for free. Even the slave owners of Paul's day didn't expect their slaves to work for free, otherwise their slaves would have been worthless and would end up dying of starvation. There had to be some sort of exchange of goods for labor.

And so, Paul expresses his concern that these people understand that he is worthy to receive his just rewards for his labors. But, so as not to paint a picture of himself being selfish or that this is only man's arrangement in the world to reward labor, Paul goes on to show that this is a divinely appointed arrangement in the world.

1CO 9:8-11 "Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? 10 Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. 11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?"

Let's look at verse 8.

1CO 9:8 "Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing?"

Here Paul directs these believers back to the law which was divinely inspired and in so doing he is giving the mind and will of God on this matter. And so, this is not merely something which should be understood from a human stand-point. And so, Paul quotes from the law.

1CO 9:9 "For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." ..."

Paul is quoting from Deut. 25:4 where the Lord is conveying a number of truths concerning how to deal with people as well as to how to take care of your animals. And the point of that law in Deuteronomy is to realize that even animals cannot serve you well if they are thirsty and hungry. Even their most basic needs need to be taken care of as they exchange labor for food and water.

In the example in Deuteronomy the ox is actually in the process of working. He's treading out the grain. The way in which a Jew in ancient Israel would have the grain treading was to spread out the grain on a large hard flat surface. They would trail a flat board with rope to the back of an ox or horse and weight it down with stones or people.

The animal, which was usually tied to a post in the middle of the area, would go round and round with this weighted board and it would crush the grain. What God was saying in Deuteronomy was

to let that animal eat as much as he wanted while working. To muzzle the ox was to be cruel to the animal and actually ensure less work from that animal.

In fact, this is why Solomon wrote in PRO 12:10 "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal..."

But the point Paul is making in quoting the law is to show how much God is concerned for a just wage being given for labor, in this illustration, even an ox.

By the way, this is a clear indication of how even O.T. law can and should be used to teach N.T. saints. We obviously are not under the law but all of Scripture is meant for our edification.

Now Paul is not trying to make the case for oxen all over Palestine to have their own union and minimum wage laws. In fact, oxen are not the point at all. This is why Paul goes on to say in verses 9 and 10: "Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest."

Paul is telling these Corinthian believers that they ought to allow him to share in the harvest of his labors. They may possibly have never offered anything for Paul's labors. Paul is saying that according to God's divinely appointed principles in work, he deserved and even had the right to receive from them.

This is usually where the Pastor thumps on his pulpit and makes the congregation feel guilty for not giving more. I won't do that. But I also won't deny that God has ordained that I, along with every other full time minister, have the right to expect from the church, and ultimately from God Himself, the wages from the body of Christ to support me and my family for services rendered of a spiritual kind.

In fact, such a laborer, according to the end of verse 10, should have the hope of sharing in the harvest, which implies an expectation.

1CO 9:11 "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?"

Unlike a farmer or a shepherd who can actually measure the amount of harvest for their labors, spiritual seed is much harder to measure. But what you'll notice here is that Paul doesn't measure

the amount of material harvest given to the laborer, by the perceived spiritual growth of the hearers.

He simply says, if we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest among you? It is the sowing of the spiritual farmer, if you will, which is the issue for a Pastor or minister. It is the sowing of the spiritual seed found in the word of God.

It is not necessarily dependent upon the seed taking root, and the individuals in the congregation saying that we have grown spiritually by 15% this year, which determines how that minister is to be rewarded.

Now, it should go without saying that a spiritual laborer must be sowing with the word of God and the love of Christ which compels him to do so. If he is not feeding the sheep, if he is not tending to the flock, if he is not nurturing and encouraging the flock with the uncompromised living word, then the flock has every right to question if he is laboring according to God's will.

Unfortunately, it seems that some Pastors have every job description given to them from their congregations which includes everything except teaching the word of God. It doesn't mean the congregations want the Pastor to exclude the word, they just want it taught in a way that tickles their ears.

And so, as long as their Pastor is entertaining and a good P.R. man and just an over-all good guy who doesn't expect much from the people in the way of being challenged in their faith and in their responsibility to serve and love Christ in their service, he is seen as a stellar example of what a Pastor should be and is usually rewarded quite handsomely.

Paul is setting the bar in a way where the only true measure of how a Pastor is to be rewarded is not by spoon feeding the flock with pabulum, but one who sows seeds which are expected to grow. But even if they don't, the faithful sowing is to be rewarded in the same way as if it were growing.

Now, hopefully as a Pastor is faithful in his sowing, the congregation will grow spiritually. But that is beyond the capabilities of the Pastor, since it is a heart issue and not necessarily a knowledge issue.

I mean how many of us in school were filled with all sorts of knowledge about any particular subject? If it were simply a matter

of gaining knowledge about chemistry, which would insure our success, we'd all be chemists today for Dow Chemical making big bucks.

But simply gaining knowledge in the world does not guarantee success any more than gaining spiritual knowledge in the body of Christ guarantees that we'll all be spiritual giants. There is still that needed element of desiring to grow as we are fed.

I've heard someone once say that there are lots of bloated Christians in this world who could use the kind of spiritual exercise which takes the knowledge and puts it into practice with lives of service to each other and the world.

All of us could stand a little more exercise like that. It's not enough to stuff ourselves on the word of God and not get out there and exert a little, or maybe even a lot, of that energy which a healthy diet of God's word can give as we make ourselves available in the power of the Holy Spirit as we submit to Him.

If anyone was a faithful sower of the word of God it was Paul. And he tells these Corinthian believers that they should consider their responsibility to sow some material blessings in return.

In fact, he goes back to those shepherds who had spent time with the Corinthians and then compares himself with them in regards to what he should expect.

1CO 9:12 "If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?"

Why does Paul deserve it all the more? Because he was the one who was instrumental in being used by God to not only minister to them with the word of God, he was the one who brought them the gospel for the first time. They heard the gospel and were saved directly through Paul's ministry to them.

From a human stand-point I suppose Paul could have said that you owe your lives to me. In fact, Paul did use this line of argument with Philemon when he was writing about Philemon's slave whom Paul was considering sending back to him, but with the understanding that he was coming back, no longer just a slave, but as a brother in Christ. And then Paul said this:

PHM 1:17-19 "So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my

own hand. I will pay it back - not to mention that you owe me your very self."

He wasn't being self-serving with Philemon, he was simply making the point that payback comes in a variety of forms and it takes into account what was given out in the first place. In Philemon's case Paul must have been the one who led him to the Lord. And he's just asking Philemon to put that into perspective now that Paul is the one responsible for leading Onesimus, Philemon's slave, to the Lord.

In a similar way, Paul is saying that you Corinthians owe me your very lives. But, he only asks that they support him with their material possessions; and yet, not really.

We're going to see that Paul is simply making the case for what any minister of the gospel can expect, but in his case, though he deserves to be supported by these people, he will give up that right for their sakes.

Remember, where all of this started? It started with the rights these Corinthians felt they had to eat meat sacrificed to idols. And Paul concurred that they had such a right, but not if it encouraged a brother or sister in Christ to sin, which suggests them not growing in Christ.

Now, Paul has given this lengthy defense of his right to be supported by them, and yet by his example he is going to point out that simply because you have the right to something in Christ, does not mean that it has to be exercised in every case if God has given you other directions. And God has given Paul other directions.

1CO 9:12-14 "If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. 13 Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel."

Paul touches on what he has chosen not to do in regards to his rights in Christ. "But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ."
(vs.12)

Evidently, Paul felt that to exercise his right to be supported by the church in Corinth would have actually hindered his ability to reach out to the lost in that region with the gospel of Christ.

We get a little insight into what was happening in that region during Paul's day in his second letter to these Corinthians.

Evidently, there were false prophets and apostles who were masquerading as servants of Christ and coming into the churches with great promises of blessings and using these methods to milk these people of their hard earned money.

Unfortunately, nothing has changed as we see the same thing happening today as many of these "evangelists" and "prophets" and "healers" fly into our towns and fly back out as soon as they have delivered the saints..... from their money.

In Paul's case he didn't want to be identified with them in this particular region. It doesn't mean he wasn't supported by the church of Christ; he just wasn't supported by the Corinthian church for this very reason.

In a rather colorful way Paul makes his point of how he is able to serve the Corinthian believers while not taking any material blessings from them.

2CO 11:8-9 "I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. 9 And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so."

For a variety of reasons Paul would not take money from the Corinthians. He would not allow his ministry to them be viewed by anyone, including the Christians in Corinth, as a for-profit ministry to himself.

But, back in our text, he once again defends his right to take from them, as well as reminding them that any present or future minister in their midst should not be neglected in having their physical needs met as they deliver spiritual seed to them.

1CO 9:13-14 "Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord

has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel."

Now, the imagery Paul gives here is that of a Jewish priest who is about doing his work in the temple. Many commentators suggest that Paul is talking about the priest in the temple of the Lord. Though, by inference it might include the priests in the pagan temples, the chances are pretty good that Paul has the priests of Israel in mind.

And these Gentile Christians in Corinth would have been familiar with the duties of the priests in Israel, since Paul himself taught these people from the O.T. Scriptures, as he used them to show how the Messiah was the fulfillment of these passages.

His point is that these Corinthian believers knew what the priests received by God's command. "There were five main offerings given in the temple:

- (1) The burnt offering;
 - (2) The sin offering, where only the fat of the offering was consumed, allowing the priests to receive all of the flesh;
 - (3) The trespass offering, which also only required the fat to be burned;
 - (4) The meat offering,
 - (5) and the peace-offering where the fat and the entrails were burned on the altar; the priest received the breast and the right shoulder; and the rest was given back to the worshipper."
- (William Barclay)

And so, Paul reminds them that it is God's design to take care of His servants who are dedicated to such ministry as the Pastoring of a church or even elders whose main function is to teach and preach. And he even makes that connection from the Old Testament to the new.

1CO 9:14 "In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel."

Paul has now made the point crystal clear. The world understands that a worker must be paid for his labors; the law makes it clear that even an ox should not be muzzled when he is threshing; the temple priests and the Levites are supported by the people in Israel for the spiritual services they render.

And now, Paul wraps up his point with the Lord Jesus Himself commanding that those who devote their lives to preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. This is touched on when Jesus sent out the 70 to minister to Israel.

LUK 10:7 "Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house."

Paul expounds on that when writing to his friend and fellow pastor.

1TI 5:17-18 "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

GAL 6:6 "Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor."

It's not a matter of a church board determining if a Pastor is worthy to receive wages, because Christ is the one who has already put it in writing. And this is why we can give to the church cheerfully. It is Christ we are serving with our giving. It is Christ who has called His servants and it is Christ we are obeying as we support His servants.

The church is responsible to encourage the Pastor and elders to faithfully feed the body with spiritual seed, but it is also the responsibility of Christ's people to support those who labor among them in that way.

This should humble every Pastor, knowing that his real employer is not the church, it is Christ Jesus Himself. One commentator put it well when he said, "The preacher who faithfully proclaims the gospel may expect to receive his living from the gospel. But woe to the man who claims to live of the gospel without living at the same time for the gospel." (Simon J. Kistemaker)

It is a high calling with many responsibilities and if we should expect God's people to support us then we should be willing to support them with the truth they need to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Each part plays a vital role in extending the Kingdom of God. For the Pastor he has a role where he can devote his life to the gospel and know that Jesus Himself has provided the means to carry on

that ministry. But, everyone else in the body also must use their gifts so that the church can go forward.

Simply paying the pastor to do it all has been the easy way out for many. Christ wants all of us; our time, our resources and our gifts. But more important, He wants our lives. Only as He has our hearts will any of our time and resources and gifts make the difference it was meant to make to the glory of God who supplies all our needs abundantly.

EPH 1:3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

May we find our encouragement in Christ in the unity of His Spirit.

ROM 15:5-7 "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."