

1Corinthians 9:1-6 "Where Are Paul's Rights?"

1CO 9:1-3 "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? 2 Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me."

You'll remember that the context has Paul teaching on the liberties we have in Christ and yet how we should not use those liberties to be a stumbling block to those whose faith is weak. And by stumbling block we mean such an obstacle which would tempt another brother or sister to sin.

But with this in mind it does appear a bit odd that Paul would seem to go in an entirely different direction as we begin this next section. Paul asks four questions. And each question expects an affirmative answer.

But what we'll find him doing is actually continuing the thought of those freedoms and rights we have in Christ as Paul now expresses those things which would be attributed to him in regards to his rights in Christ.

He begins with the question, "Am I not free?" Remember that these Corinthians had written to Paul and had expressed concerns that they were free to do certain things in Christ. One of those things was to eat any kind of food they chose, even if that food was sacrificed to idols, which Paul makes clear are not real, because there is only one true God.

And so, he sets the stage here in verse one by saying that he is no different from any other Christian who has these freedoms and rights in Christ.

And the way in which this question is posed he expects them to agree that he, like them, is free in Christ, first and foremost as he is free from the bondage of sin and the penalty of sin. Thus, this makes him free to have a dynamic relationship with Christ without all of restrictions the Law of Moses would have placed on him.

The second question he poses is, "Am I not an apostle?" This may sound like an absurd question in light of the fact that they knew he was an apostle. And that's part of the point. He is driving home

the fact that as an apostle he had authority and the ministry to set the foundation for the cornerstone.

This is what he had said earlier in this letter.

1CO 3:10-11 "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

He is doing the work which was given to him as an apostle. And so, he is making it clear that he isn't in some ivory tower barking out orders to the subordinates in Corinth as though he were somehow detached from the real world. But rather, as an apostle, he is actively involved in the lives of believers all over the world.

By the way, there were those who had questioned his apostleship. There were those who felt that he wasn't a true apostle since he was not numbered along with the 12. But this didn't make him any less an apostle. In fact, he will make a strong case for his apostleship in the next question.

"Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" This was a prerequisite to being called to the office of apostle. When Peter was placed in the position of choosing the twelfth apostle after Judas had committed suicide he wrote this:

ACT 1:21-22 "Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

Later in Acts Peter again makes it clear that this was something to which he could bear witness along with the other apostles.

ACT 2:32 "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact."

You cannot be a credible witness if you're the bearer of second hand information. This is why our faith doesn't rest on hear-say. There are those who would say, "how can you believe something when you weren't there?" The same might be said to them. "How do you know your great-great father existed? Were you there when he was born?"

No. But his wife can bear witness to the fact that he existed, who then bore children who were raised in that family, who then

became parents and had children who spoke of their grandfather and so on.

Simply because we weren't there doesn't mean that they didn't truly exist. We rely on those witnesses who were. Why does anyone in this country believe that George Washington existed? Were we there? No. We rely on the people who were and who knew and wrote of George Washington.

An apostle witnessed, first-hand, the risen Christ. They saw the Lord and they wrote down the facts surrounding his life and resurrection. In Paul's case he did not sit under Christ during his earthly ministry. But there's a more than excellent chance that Paul was around during Christ's ministry and may have actually seen Him as He preached to the crowds.

Remember, Paul came on to the scene very shortly after Christ's resurrection and was involved in the death of Stephen who was a follower of Christ. In the account of Stephen's death when he was martyred for his faith we're told the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. (Act 7:58)

Saul was a young man, but he was not a kid. He was a Pharisee at this time and was given the responsibility to track down those Jews who were proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah.

ACT 8:3 "But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison."

And so, he most certainly would have been old enough to have been around during Christ's earthly ministry. But when Paul says, "have I not seen Jesus our Lord", he's not talking about seeing Christ prior to His crucifixion and resurrection, as true as that may have been.

Paul is talking about seeing and therefore being a first-hand eye witness of the risen Christ. You might remember the circumstances surrounding this event as Saul was on his way to Damascus under orders from the Sanhedrin to destroy the church there.

ACT 9:3-6 "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.""

It was here that Saul, later to be called Paul, actually saw the risen Jesus Christ. And it was here that our Lord Jesus promised him that he would send a messenger who would give him further instructions concerning his mission of being an apostle of Christ to the Gentile world.

This is why we need to understand that when we read these words of Paul we are reading the account of a man who was involved in the persecution and murder of Christians one day, and the next was part of that same church as he embraced the Lord and Master who appeared to him that day on the road to Damascus.

Paul is one of the main reasons we can be assured that Jesus Christ is who He said He is. Not only did Paul see Him after His resurrection, but it had such a profound affect on his life that he spent the rest of his days loving and serving this risen Lord.

Now, if I told you that I was a witness to an accident and gave you the details to that accident you might be prone to believe me, but if there were hundreds of others who were there and saw it as well, and gave a similar account, then chances are very good that you could believe that that accident took place.

Paul is one of many witnesses to the risen Christ and this is why we have confidence in an event that took place some 2,000 years ago as Jesus of Nazareth, who had claimed on several occasions to be the Son of God and Savior of this world, went to a cross outside of Jerusalem and died on that cross to pay for our sins, and then who rose bodily from the dead three days later.

This is not some fanciful story the disciples made up and then gave their lives for. And this is why Peter was so insistent when he bore testimony to these facts.

ACT 10:39-43 "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen - by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Like Peter, Paul can now say that he has seen this same person. In fact, notice that Paul conspicuously identifies our Lord, not as Jesus Christ, or as the Christ. He simply identifies Him as Jesus our Lord.

Jesus was the name identified with the person. Christ is the designation of His office and work as Savior. What Paul is doing is identifying the man Jesus who walked this earth, who touched the lives of people, who fed the thousands. Paul was saying, that this is the one he met on the road to Damascus; the same one who walked among men.

And in this way Paul was saying that he did not meet up with a phantom or a ghost or a figment of his imagination or some hallucination. He met the man, the risen Jesus. But Paul goes on to say that this man Jesus is our Lord. And so, in one short sentence Paul identifies the man Jesus as being the Lord and Master of the universe.

This is why Paul was so confident in placing his eternal destiny in the hands of this person we know as Jesus Christ, because he knew that this same person who, just a short time before was walking around Jerusalem, but who was killed as our Savior, was now standing before him as the risen Lord. And this is why we can be confident in placing our faith in Jesus Christ as well; fully God and fully man.

And so, in these first three questions in verse one Paul is building to the climax of saying that he is not some fly-by-night evangelist trying to make a buck off of these people. He loves them and only desires that they see Jesus the same way he does, as Lord and Savior. And this is seen in the fourth question.

"Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?" How did Paul get these people to devote their lives to Christ? How did he convince them that they should lay all else aside for the Kingdom of God through faith in Christ? How did he convince them that there is salvation in no other name?

They have believed because God the Holy Spirit opened their eyes. And the Spirit of God did it through the very ministry of Paul as he was chosen by Christ to go out into the world with this message of hope.

Paul is saying that, 'because Christ is alive you Corinthians have life in Christ. And because Christ is alive I have been sent to you

with this message of hope and life, and because you have received it by faith you prove that Christ is alive through my ministry.'

Paul says, 'You are the result of my work in the Lord. I didn't save you, but Christ proves that He has chosen me and has used me as an apostle through my steadfast work through the gospel of Jesus Christ, and your acceptance of it is part of that proof.'

And despite the fact that others did not believe that Paul was an apostle there was no way these Corinthians could have believed otherwise. They knew Paul was sent by Christ and that the Lord had worked in their lives through him.

1CO 9:2-3 "Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me."

When Paul wrote his second letter to these people he said the same thing in a little different way.

2CO 3:1-3 "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. 3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

Keep in mind that this is the same church which has been in turmoil and division. And yet, even in the midst of all of their problems the Holy Spirit was working and some fruit could be seen despite some of their selfish motives. What a merciful and gracious God we serve.

But as Paul has shown and will continue to show, even in the midst of our petty differences among each other and how that can adversely affect the body, and despite how God can and does work through that so that He is still shown to be God, we should never use that as an excuse to go our own way and still expect God to be glorified.

What Paul shows here is that despite ourselves God will be true to Himself and will still bear witness that He's alive in the hearts of His people. But it will be those faithful people in the midst of the selfish one's who will be the ones shining for Christ and proving that our Lord is still at work in that body.

And so when Paul says, that you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord, he doesn't mean to suggest that those who are backbiting and causing division in Corinth are the shining example of that.

But on the same note he can say to the world that despite the problems in Corinth they are still the people who are his defense to those who sit in judgment on him. Paul's apostleship is not dependent on those who make such judgments. His apostleship is dependent on the One who called him, and that's Jesus Christ Himself.

Now, what Paul is about to do is to go back in his defense of his calling and help these believers in Corinth to consider the freedoms and rights he has as an apostle. Just because he is an apostle does not mean that he has lost any of the things which these Corinthians claim as theirs in Christ. And yet, as Paul did at the end of chapter 8, he will not insist on these rights for the sake of these Corinthians.

1CO 9:4-6 "Don't we have the right to food and drink? 5 Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? 6 Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?"

What is Paul talking about here? What does this have to do with being an apostle and having certain rights in Christ? Part of this has to do with Paul's defense of his apostleship and his apparent putting aside of certain of these liberties or rights in Christ for the sake of these Corinthian believers.

Keep in mind that this is still in the context of him saying in 1CO 8:13 "Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall."

There were those who undoubtedly questioned his true apostolic ministry by suggesting that a true apostle would most certainly exercise all of his authority and rights as an apostle. He would not lay aside these rights for the sake of common believers. In other words, he should act in the royal role he's been given and not bow to any man.

What Paul is doing, by his example, is showing the "common believer" that no one is above His master, who laid down His life for the sheep; not even an apostle. And yet, he recognizes that he still has these liberties and rights and if anyone, including an apostle, wants to exercise them then he is free to do so.

But, Paul is choosing not to as the Lord has led him. And so, one should not confuse his refusal to practice such freedoms as a sign of weakness, but as a sign of one following Christ in all things and being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

1CO 9:4 "Don't we have the right to food and drink?"

In the context Paul is talking about the Corinthians providing his needs for sustenance of life. He is saying that as their shepherd they are obliged to meet those needs. And by implication Paul is saying that the rest of the apostles are having their needs met by the body of Christ. He then goes on to say:

1CO 9:5 "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?"

Keep in mind that at this point in his ministry, Paul, and probably Barnabas, since he is mentioned here, were not married. But this didn't mean that they didn't have the right to take a wife. They simply chose not to as they considered that it would be more advantageous to their ministry to Christ, not to.

But simply being different from the rest of the apostles in this area didn't make Paul less than an apostle.

By the way, Barnabas, you might remember was the one whom Paul had a falling out with. These two men were used greatly by the Lord and it was actually Barnabas who was used by the Lord to bring Paul from Tarsus to Antioch to teach the church there. The two of them were set apart by the Holy Spirit and they traveled together preaching the gospel all over the world.

But, they ran into a problem as human beings sometimes do.

ACT 15:36-40 "Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord."

With Paul mentioning Barnabas here in 1Corinthians it seems that the two of them reconciled and were once again in fellowship with

each other as they were each still concerned with teaching and preaching the word of God to the building up of the body of Christ.

In keeping with the rights they have as apostles Barnabas and Paul may take wives, but they choose not to.

Now, you'll notice that the NIV uses the word rights as does the NASB and the NKJV. The KJV uses the word power. "Don't we have the right or the power to take a believing wife along with us?"

The Greek word could be translated power of choice, or liberty of doing as one pleases. Sometimes we'll hear the phrase that as Christians we have no rights. And to the degree that we have a right to demand anything of Christ that would be out of accord to His revealed word and will, that is absolutely correct.

But Paul makes it clear that a liberty given to us according to the word of God is actually a right which Christ has given us. But a right to something does not necessarily make it something we can practice without regard for others. And as we saw last week, your right in Christ goes only as far as another brother or sister in Christ who may find themselves sinning because you use your right in an unlawful or unloving way.

Paul's point is not that he would be using his right to receive food and drink from the Corinthians in an unloving way, or that he would be using his right to a wife in an unloving way, but that he has waived his right for the glory of God as the Lord has led him to do this.

He's not suggesting that he's holier than the other apostles for not practicing this right as he actually defends those apostles in their choice. In fact, he goes so far as to say that the other apostles have the right to be supported by the church as he points out that he's not being supported.

1CO 9:6 "Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?"

Now this may sound like a cynical approach to Paul's teaching, and there may be some cynicism tied to it. But this is not the point. Paul is not trying to shame these believers in Corinth to start supporting him, rather he's pointing out, because he loves them so much, he has given that right up, while at the same time teaching that it is good for the body of Christ to support such servants.

In fact, as he just said in verse 5, not only does the church have the privilege and responsibility to support such ministers, but they also have the privilege and responsibility to support their wives so that they may, in Paul's words, "take a believing wife along with them" as they go out to minister to the world.

One of the hardest obstacles for such servants was to be separated from their families for extended periods of time, which can bring real temptations into the picture. Paul is saying that as far as is possible, such servants need to bring their wives, and by implication their families, to help in the ministry by supporting their husbands in the work.

And so, Peter evidently brought his wife along as did the rest of the apostles. And next week we'll see how Paul begins to tie all of this up as he shows these Corinthian believers that they too have responsibilities in the Kingdom of God, not just to themselves but to those whom Christ has placed alongside them to teach and build up.

It all comes down to recognizing that it is Christ Jesus Himself who is building His church and He is the one placing people where they need to be in any local body. And we must all be pursuing the best for each other as we assume our responsibilities to be servants in those bodies with our gifts and income and time.

It all belongs to the Lord and He has graciously given us the privilege to manage those things He has given us so that the gospel of Jesus Christ might go out unhindered and to the glory of God.

Paul may not have exercised all of his rights as an apostle, but he certainly exercised one right which he never gave up, and that was to love the sheep with the truth and to promote the peace and unity in the body of Christ with the truth in love. He loves these people in Corinth too much to compromise that.

And we should never compromise the truth as it pertains to those things that would build each other up. Paul puts it this way when writing to the Romans.

ROM 12:9-16 "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who

persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another...."