

1 CORINTHIANS 9:12

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 9. In this chapter Paul asked a number of rhetorical questions to emphasize his rights as an apostle. He started in the first two verses by proving that he was an apostle. Then in verses 3 and following he began to defend his rights as an apostle. In verse 4–6 he asked three rhetorical questions that centered on his right to have financial support. In verse 4 he talked about his right to eat and drink. In verse 5 he talked about his right to have a believing wife who would travel with him. And in verse 6 he talked about his right to refrain from working. Now both Paul and Barnabas were single and chose to work with their hands to provide for themselves. But Paul’s point here was that they had these rights, just like the other apostles.

Then in verse 7 Paul asked three more rhetorical questions, and in each one he gave an illustration from everyday life to defend his right to receive support as an apostle. The first one was a soldier, the second one was a farmer, and the third one was a shepherd. But Paul didn’t just make his argument from a human perspective. In verse 9 he quoted the law of Moses and specifically Deuteronomy 25:4. This statement had to do with letting oxen eat while they were working. And Paul used it to argue from the lesser to the greater here. If we should show kindness to our animals, then we should certainly be kind to our fellow human beings as well. And one of the ways that we should show kindness is by rewarding people who work hard for us.

Now last week we looked at verse 11, where Paul asked another rhetorical question: “If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it too much if we reap material benefits from you?” So Paul raised the possibility that he sowed spiritual things for the Corinthians. And I think it’s obvious that he did. After all, he was the one who planted the church in Corinth. It was through his gospel preaching that many people there got saved. But Paul wasn’t there all by himself. He brought Silas and Timothy along with him. The three of them worked together to sow spiritual things for the benefit of the Corinthians. So Paul understood the importance of having a team of people to come alongside him and assist him. Having partners in ministry would help him to persevere.

So if Paul and his missionary team sowed spiritual things for the Corinthians, and they did, then was it too much if they reaped material benefits from the Corinthians? The obvious answer to that question is “no.” Paul was basically arguing from the greater to the lesser here. He was saying that spiritual things are more important than material things. So it was not a big deal for Paul and his coworkers to receive material benefits from the Corinthians like food and drink. They had the right to receive financial support for their ministry to the Corinthians. And the same thing is true today for elders and other Christian leaders

who work hard at preaching and teaching God's Word. When we find good teachers, we should learn from them and support them.

Now let's look at the next verse in 1 Corinthians 9. We're ready to cover some new material. Look at what Paul wrote in verse 12: "If others have this right to receive benefits from you, don't we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right; instead, we endure everything so that we will not hinder the gospel of Christ." Paul began this verse by asking yet another rhetorical question. We've already seen 15 of them in the first 11 verses. So we're now looking at the sixteenth one in this chapter. And hopefully you remember that a rhetorical question has an obvious answer. So Paul wasn't asking all these questions because he was looking for the answers. He was asking them because he wanted his readers to stop and think more deeply about what he was talking about.

Now this question is a lot like the one we just saw in verse 11, because it has a conditional sentence. As you probably remember, a conditional sentence has two parts. One of them begins with the word "if," and the other one sometimes begins with the word "then," though that's not required. But the word "if" is the key word in a conditional sentence, and normally it comes first like we have here. This word introduces a condition that must be met for the other part of the sentence to happen or to be true. So let's take a closer look at this condition in the beginning of verse 11. Paul said, "If others have this right to receive benefits from you." The word "others" just refers to generally to people who are not included in the group under discussion. Paul just referred to his missionary team, and so here he was talking about people who weren't part of his missionary team.

Now the word "have" comes from a Greek verb that literally means "to share." That's the word found in the English Standard Version, the Legacy Standard Bible, and the New American Standard Bible. This Greek verb is actually the same one that we just saw in verse 10, where Paul said that "he who threshes should thresh in hope of sharing the crop." This verb is used just eight times in the New Testament. Three of them are in Hebrews, and all five of the others are here in this letter. And this word just means to participate in something. So Paul raised the possibility that others shared or participated in something. And that something was the right to receive benefits from the Corinthian believers. The Greek word for right usually means "authority." That's the word used here in the Legacy Standard Bible. And normally the Christian Standard Bible has the word "authority" whenever this Greek word is used.

But sometimes this Greek word refers to the right to do something. That's how it's used in John 10. Look at what Jesus said in verses 17–18: "This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father." This passage is very significant, because it shows that Jesus wasn't helpless when he died on the cross. It's not like he was backed into a corner and forced to die against his will. But he had the right to lay down his life, and he used that right. He died voluntarily to pay for our sins.

And that's how Paul used this word earlier in chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians. In verse 4 he said that he had the right to eat and drink. In verse 5 he said that he had the right to be accompanied by a believing wife.

And in verse 6 he said that he had the right to refrain from working. In all three verses he was talking generally about the right to have financial support for his ministry to the Corinthians. So in verse 12 Paul was using this Greek word with the same nuance. He was referring back to the collection of rights that he mentioned in verses 4–6. So I don't think that the Legacy Standard Bible is correct to have the word "authority" in verse 12. I prefer the word "right" instead, and this is the word that's found in the Christian Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible.

Now the Christian Standard Bible says "this right," but the Greek text just has the article here. It's roughly equivalent to our definite article in English. So the New American Standard Bible is more literal when it says "the right." But the Greek article is clearly pointing back to verses 4–6 and Paul's earlier uses of the word "right." Now the Christian Standard Bible mentions the right to receive benefits. But that phrase "to receive benefits" doesn't come directly from the original Greek text. The translators just added it to clarify what Paul was talking about. In verse 11 he referred to material benefits, and here in verse 12 he was talking about the right to receive these material benefits.

Then the Christian Standard Bible has the phrase "from you," which flows nicely from the previous phrase. But the Greek text here just literally means "of you." Now the word "of" is flexible and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. But the Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible probably have the best interpretation. They have the phrase "over you." But what does it mean for Paul to have the right over the Corinthian believers? That statement is a bit vague, so other translations go with something smoother. The English Standard Version has the phrase "this rightful claim on you." But I really like the Christian Standard Bible, which has the phrase "this right to receive benefits from you." That's not a very literal translation, but I think it conveys Paul's meaning pretty well.

Now Bible scholars argue with each other about whom Paul was specifically thinking about here when he used the word "others." Who were these people who shared the right to receive material benefits from the Corinthian believers? Now we know from verses 4–6 that the apostles had this right and that they took advantage of it. But did Paul have any specific apostles in mind? Well, he referred to Cephas or the apostle Peter in verse 5. And he also referred to Cephas back in chapters 1 and 3. So Paul was probably thinking about Peter here in verse 12. But we also saw references to Apollos back in chapter 1 and 3. And Paul mentioned him in chapter 4 as well. So I think it's very likely that Peter and Apollos were among those who received financial support from the Corinthian believers. It seems that both of them spent time teaching the Corinthian believers sometime before Paul wrote this letter.

So we can see that the condition Paul gave in the beginning of verse 12 has been met. There were indeed others who shared in the right to receive material benefits from the Corinthian believers. Now at this point we would normally conclude that the second part of the conditional sentence is true. But as I mentioned earlier, this conditional sentence is actually a question. So I think the point here is that since the condition has been met, now we can ask this question: "Don't we even more?" The word "we" refers to Paul and his missionary team, just like it did in verse 11. And the word "more" raises the possibility that they had an even greater right to receive financial support from the Corinthians than men like Peter and Apollos. And I think the obvious answer to this rhetorical question is "yes." After all, Paul and his mis-

sionary team started the church in Corinth. And they even ministered there for 18 months and taught God's Word to the Corinthians.

So clearly Paul believed that he and his missionary team had the right to receive financial support from the Corinthian believers. But his point here wasn't to get them to give him money. Look at what he said next in verse 12: "Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right." The Greek word for nevertheless is usually just translated with the word "but." It normally introduces a strong contrast, and that's how Paul was using it here. So the word "nevertheless" communicates that idea nicely. Now the Greek verb translated with the phrase "made use of" is found only eleven times in the New Testament, but Paul wrote nine of them. Four of them are in this letter, and we already saw the first two back in chapter 7. Let me show you the first one. Look at what Paul wrote in chapter 7 and verse 21: "Were you called while a slave? Don't let it concern you. But if you can become free, by all means take the opportunity." The Greek word here for take is the same one that we just saw in chapter and verse 12. It literally means "to make use of."

So in chapter 7 Paul was talking about a believing slave making use of the opportunity to become free. But in chapter 9 he was talking about not making use of a right. The Greek word for right in verse 12 is the same one that we just saw earlier in the verse. And this time Paul did use a Greek word that normally means "this." So he was clearly pointing back to the right that he was just talking about. It was the right to receive financial support from the Corinthian believers. And Paul was saying that he and his missionary team did not make use of this right. They did not accept any financial support from the Corinthian believers while they were ministering in the city, even though they could have.

Then Paul used the word "instead," which comes from the same Greek word that we just saw. Earlier in the verse it was translated with the word "nevertheless," and here it's translated with the word "instead." Both of these words introduce a strong contrast, and that's exactly what Paul was communicating here. He did something totally different from accepting financial support from the Corinthian believers. He said, "We endure everything." The Greek verb for endure is used only four times in the New Testament, but Paul wrote all four of them. Two of them are in 1 Thessalonians, and the other two are here in 1 Corinthians. Let's look at the other occurrence of the word in this letter. Look at chapter 13 and verse 7: "It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Paul was of course talking about love in this chapter. He was describing what Christian love looks like. And one of the things he said about love is that it bears all things. Now at the end of the verse he talked about something similar when he said that love endures all things. But the Greek word for bears is the one that Paul used in chapter 9. It just means "to put up with someone or something." And in this case Paul said that love puts up with all things. Now does this mean that Paul was in favor of tolerating sin? I think the answer is obviously "no." We've already seen back in chapter 5 that Paul didn't tolerate incest in the Corinthian church. So I don't think Paul was saying that we should put up with absolutely everything. He was just saying that love puts up with a wide variety of difficult situations.

And Paul was a great example for the Corinthian believers to follow here. In chapter 9 and verse 12 he said that he and his missionary team endured everything. But he used the same two Greek words that are

found in the beginning of verse 7 in chapter 13. They put up with a wide variety of difficult situations. And of course the one that Paul was focused on here in chapter 9 was working with their hands while serving the Lord full time. Acts 18:3 tells us that Paul worked as a tentmaker in Corinth. Now this was a hardship that Paul didn't have to put up with. But he did it anyway, and he continued to do it after he left Corinth. The Greek verb here is in the present tense, which stresses an ongoing action. So Paul and his missionary team didn't work with their hands just while they were in Corinth. It was their regular practice to do that wherever they went.

And one of those places was the city of Thessalonica. Look at what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:9: "For you remember our labor and hardship, brothers and sisters. Working night and day so that we would not burden any of you, we preached God's gospel to you." Now look at what Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9: "For you yourselves know how you should imitate us: We were not idle among you; we did not eat anyone's food free of charge; instead, we labored and toiled, working night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you. It is not that we don't have the right to support, but we did it to make ourselves an example to you so that you would imitate us."

So Paul and his missionary team worked very hard in Thessalonica. They worked to provide for the spiritual needs of the Thessalonians, but they also worked to provide for their own material needs. And Paul made it clear that they had the right to receive financial support. But they chose not to accept any support because they wanted to be an example to the Thessalonians. Look at what Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12: "In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: 'If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat.'" For we hear that there are some among you who are idle. They are not busy but busybodies. Now we command and exhort such people by the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and provide for themselves."

So there were some lazy people in the Thessalonian church. And Paul said that those people shouldn't eat unless they're willing to work. They needed to get busy working instead of being busybodies. I think the principle here is that when we're idle, it's easier to get into trouble. So Paul told these people to work quietly and provide for themselves. And Paul and his missionary team were an example for them to follow. But in 1 Corinthians 9:12 Paul had a different motivation for working with his hands. Look at how he finished this verse: "So that we will not hinder the gospel of Christ." The phrase "so that" comes from a Greek conjunction that normally introduces the purpose or reason for doing something. The reason Paul and his missionary team endured everything was so that they would not hinder the gospel.

Now the Christian Standard Bible is not super literal here. The original Greek text is more literally translated with the phrase "we will not cause any hindrance." The Greek verb here usually means "to give," but sometimes it means "to cause," and that seems to be the idea here. Paul was talking about not causing any hindrance. So the Greek word for hindrance here is not a verb but a noun. It's the direct object of the verb that means "cause." So the Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible are more literal here with the phrase "we will cause no hindrance." But for some reason they don't translate the Greek word that means "any." And this word is important because it brings emphasis. Paul wasn't just saying that he didn't want to cause a hindrance. He said that he didn't want to cause any hindrance.

Now the Greek word for hindrance is used only here in the New Testament. This word refers to something that holds back the progress of something else. So Paul didn't want to do anything that would hold back the progress of the gospel. If he had accepted financial support from the Corinthians, they might have thought that they had the right to tell him what to do and where to go. They could have told him to stay in Corinth indefinitely, or they could have told him not to go to certain places. But Paul did not want to be under any obligation to the Corinthians. That could have hindered his gospel ministry in other places. In Romans 15:20 Paul said that his aim was to preach the gospel where Christ was not named. Then a few verses later he said that he wanted to go to Spain. But maybe the Corinthians would have tried to stop him from going there if he accepted their support.

So the reason Paul didn't accept financial support from the Corinthians is that he didn't want to cause any hindrance to the gospel. The Greek word for gospel here just refers to good news. And in the New Testament this word always refers to good news about Jesus. That's very clear here in verse 12, because Paul referred to the gospel of Christ. The Greek word for Christ means "anointed one," just like the Hebrew word for Messiah. So Paul was emphasizing that Jesus was the Messiah who was promised in the Old Testament. During Old Testament times prophets, priests, and kings were anointed before serving in leadership. And Jesus fulfills all three of those roles. He always speaks God's words, he provides access to God as our mediator, and one day he will come back to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Now Paul used the Greek word for gospel eight times in this letter, and we already saw the first one back in chapter 4 and verse 15. In that verse Paul said that he became the father of the Corinthians through the gospel. He preached the good news to them about Jesus and led them to repent and trust in Christ for salvation. So now we're seeing the second use of the Greek word for gospel here in chapter 9 and verse 12. And we're going to see this word five more times in this chapter. But then Paul used this word one more time in chapter 15. Look at what he wrote in verses 1–2: "Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."

Then Paul went on to review the gospel for the Corinthians. Look at what he wrote in verses 3–5: "For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve." So there are four elements of the gospel here: Jesus died, he was buried, he was raised, and he appeared. We tend to focus only on the first and third elements, and certainly they are emphasized here. Paul said that both the death and the resurrection happened according to the Scriptures. In other words, they were taught in the Old Testament.

But we shouldn't ignore the other two elements of the gospel here. They provide the proof for the death and resurrection of Christ. The fact that Jesus was buried proves that he was dead. And the fact that Jesus appeared to many witnesses proves that he rose from the dead. In fact, verse 6 even says that Jesus appeared to more than 500 believers at one time. So the resurrection of Jesus is not just a fairy tale. It's a well-established historical fact. And it's an important fact, because it proves that Jesus is God and that his death was sufficient to pay for our sins. So let's rejoice in the fact that our Lord is alive right now. He's at

the right hand of the Father right now interceding for us. No one can bring a legitimate accusation against us. If we've repented and trusted in Christ, then all our sins are forgiven, and one day we will spend eternity with him. Let's close in prayer and thank God for these wonderful blessings.