

1 CORINTHIANS 9:13–14

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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.

Then in verse 11 Paul asked another rhetorical question: “If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it too much if we reap material benefits from you?” Now it’s obvious that Paul did indeed sow spiritual things for the Corinthians. After all, he was the one who planted the church in Corinth. It was through his gospel preaching that many people there got saved. And Paul wasn’t alone; Silas and Timothy were with him. They came along on his second missionary journey to assist him. So Paul was basically arguing from the greater to the lesser here. He was saying that spiritual things are more important than material things. So the obvious answer to this question is “no.” It was not too much 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.

Then in verse 12 Paul asked another rhetorical question: “If others have this right to receive benefits from you, don’t we even more?” And the obvious answer here is “yes.” Now when Paul used the word “others,” he was probably thinking specifically about Peter and Apollos, because he mentioned them multiple times earlier in the letter. So I think it’s very likely that these men were among those who received financial support from the Corinthians. It seems that both of them spent time in Corinth teaching the believ-

ers there. But Paul's point here is that he and his missionary team had an even greater right to receive financial support from the Corinthian believers. They didn't just start the church in Corinth; they taught God's Word there for 18 months.

But Paul's point here wasn't to get the Corinthian believers to give him money. At the end of verse 12 he said, "Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right; instead, we endure everything so that we will not hinder the gospel of Christ." So Paul and his missionary team did not take advantage of their right to receive financial support. Instead they endured everything. Now this doesn't mean that Paul was in favor of tolerating sin. 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 they put up with absolutely everything. He was just saying that they put up with a wide variety of difficult situations. And one of them was working with their hands while they served the Lord full time.

But why did they do that when they didn't need to? Paul finished verse 12 by giving the reason. They did not want to hinder the gospel of Christ. If Paul 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. And Paul did not want his gospel ministry to be hindered in that way.

Now at this point we might think that Paul was done talking about his right to receive financial support. But as we're going to see today, that was not the case. 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 13: "Don't you know that those who perform the temple services eat the food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the offerings of the altar?" In this verse Paul asked yet another rhetorical question. We've already seen 16 of them in the first 12 verses. So we're now looking at the seventeenth 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.

But Paul started this rhetorical question with a very important phrase: "Don't you know that." This phrase is used nine times in this letter, and we've already seen seven of them. But Paul only used it once in all his other letters. So we should ask ourselves why he used it so many times here in 1 Corinthians. And I think the reason is that he was trying to teach the Corinthian believers a lesson. We saw earlier in this letter that they boasted about their knowledge and wisdom. They thought too highly of themselves, and so Paul needed to confront them about their pride. Now this doesn't mean that the Corinthian believers didn't have any knowledge about spiritual things. After all, we know from Acts 18:11 that Paul taught the word of God in Corinth for a year and a half. But the problem was that these people often didn't live in accordance with the knowledge that they had.

So I think that the obvious answer to Paul's question here in 1 Corinthians 9:13 is "yes." The Corinthian believers didn't have as much knowledge as they thought, but they almost certainly knew what Paul was talking about in this question. The problem was that they weren't applying this knowledge to their lives. So Paul paused to give them a reminder. Now the rest of this question has two parts. Let's take a closer look at the first one. The first thing the Corinthian believers should have known was that "those who perform the temple services eat the food from the temple." Now the Greek word for perform usually just means "to work." It's the same word that Paul used back in verse 6, where he talked about his right to refrain from working.

But here in verse 13 this word refers to a special kind of work. Paul was talking about performing temple services. The Greek word for temple services is used only twice in the New Testament, and Paul wrote both of them. The other one is found in 2 Timothy 3:15. Look at what Paul wrote to Timothy in this verse: "And you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." In this verse our Greek word is translated with the word "sacred." It basically refers to something that is holy and pure. And certainly the Scriptures are worthy of being described in that way. Scripture is perfect and has no errors in it, because all Scripture is inspired by God. That's what Paul said in the next verse.

But there's another Greek word that also means "holy," and this is the one that the writers of Scripture normally used. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul used this word to refer to the Holy Spirit. But the word that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 9:13 is much more rare. It's an adjective, and it actually comes from the same root as the Greek noun for temple. And we're actually going to be seeing this word later in the verse. So it makes sense that the Christian Standard Bible has the phrase "temple services." But Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible are a bit more literal here. They have the phrase "sacred services." An even more literal translation would be the phrase "holy things." But the context is focused on the temple, and so Paul was probably talking about the sacred services offered at the temple.

Now what did Paul say about the people who perform these sacred services? He said that they "eat the food from the temple." The Greek verb for eat is the same one that we've already seen several times in this chapter. We saw it in verse 4, where Paul talked about his right to eat and drink. Then he used it again in verse 7, where he talked about a farmer eating fruit from his vineyard. Now in verse 13 this verb is in the Greek present tense, which is similar to our present tense in English. After all, both of them usually refer to present time from the perspective of the writer or speaker. But the Greek present tense usually includes the idea of continuous or repeated action. So Paul was talking about people who ate something regularly.

And Paul said that they ate "the food from the temple." Now there is no Greek word for food here, and that's why this word is in italics in the Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible. So a literal translation here would be the phrase "eat from the temple." But it's perfectly clear here that Paul was talking about eating food, and that's why he didn't need to state the obvious. Now the Greek word for temple is used 70 times in the New Testament. But this is the only one that Paul wrote. All the other occurrences of this word are in the Gospels and Acts. And this word just refers to a building or a set of buildings where a deity was worshiped. It could be used for worship to the true God or to a false god.

So which one was Paul talking about here? Was he referring to the temple for the true God in Jerusalem? Or was he referring to any random temple for a false god in Corinth? Some Bible scholars think that Paul was talking about any temple in Corinth since that's where Paul sent this letter. Plus in the previous chapter Paul talked about meat sacrificed to idols at various temples in Corinth. But most conservative Bible scholars say that Paul was talking about the worship of the true God at the temple in Jerusalem. And I agree with them. We're going to see that there's a strong connection between verses 13 and 14. And since verse 14 is talking about the true God, I'm inclined to think that verse 13 is talking about the true God as well. Paul certainly would have taught the Old Testament to the believers in Corinth during the 18 months that he was there. So they would have learned all about the temple in Jerusalem. And I think they would have understood that Paul was talking about this temple in verse 13.

Now let's look at the second part of the question in this verse. The second thing the Corinthian believers should have known was that "those who serve at the altar share in the offerings of the altar." Now the Christian Standard Bible connects the two parts of this question with the word "and." This word can be found in most other translations as well. But the Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible put this word in italics, which tells us that there is no Greek word here that means "and." So I think the point is that Paul was not adding a parallel statement. Instead he was adding a statement that was more specific than the first one. He was giving an example of what he just talked about.

So in the first half of the verse he talked generally about those who perform temple services. And in the second half of the verse he talked specifically about those who serve at the altar. The Greek word for serve is used only here in the New Testament. But in extrabiblical literature it often referred to service done by a temple priest. And that's clearly what Paul was talking about here, because he talked about serving at the altar. An altar was a place where sacrifices were offered to a deity. Now the Greek word for altar is used 23 times in the New Testament, but only four of them are in Paul's letters. One of them is found in Romans 11:3, but the other three are in this letter. It's used twice in this verse, and it's also found in chapter 10 and verse 18. Look at what Paul wrote in this verse: "Consider the people of Israel. Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?" The obvious answer to this rhetorical question is "yes." But what I wanted you to see is that Paul was talking about Israel here. So I think that he was also talking about Israel in chapter 9 and verse 13. This altar was in the temple in Jerusalem.

So when Paul talked about those who serve at the altar, he was referring specifically to the priests. And what he said about them was that they "share in the offerings of the altar." The Greek word for share is used only here in the New Testament. Now we saw a different Greek word for share in verses 10 and 12. That one refers to participating in something. But this Greek word in verse 13 refers to receiving a portion of something. Now there is no Greek word for offerings here, and that's why this word isn't found in the Legacy Standard Bible or the New American Standard Bible. A more literal translation here is the phrase "share with the altar." And the Greek word for altar is the same one that we just saw earlier in the verse. So it's clear that Paul was talking about sacrificial offerings here. He didn't need to use a Greek word for offering because it was already obvious.

So Paul was basically saying that the Israelite priests got to have some of the food that was sacrificed to

the Lord. And that's exactly what we see taught in the Old Testament. Listen to Leviticus 7:8: "As for the priest who presents someone's burnt offering, the hide of the burnt offering he has presented belongs to him; it is the priest's." Now listen to Deuteronomy 18:1: "The Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, will have no portion or inheritance with Israel. They will eat the LORD's food offerings; that is their inheritance." I could read many other passages to you, but I think these two are sufficient to prove my point. God clearly taught in the Old Testament that the priests were to eat at least a portion of the sacrifices that were offered on the altar. So they did not have to work for free. They received support for their ministry to the Lord.

And I think it's obvious why Paul made a reference to this practice in 1 Corinthians 9:13. But in verse 14 he spelled out his point very clearly. Look at what he wrote in this verse: "In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel." The phrase "in the same way" comes from two Greek words that can be literally translated "so also." Those are the two words that are at the beginning of this verse in the Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible. The Greek word for so points back to the previous verse and builds on it. And the Greek word for also introduces an additional statement.

So in verse 14 Paul was presenting the application of his teaching in verse 13. And he made a reference to the Lord here. The Greek word for Lord is very common in the New Testament. It's used over 700 times, and about 275 of them are in Paul's letters, with 66 of them occurring in this letter. We've already seen 41 of them, and in almost every case we've seen that it refers to Jesus. For example, in verse 1 Paul asked this rhetorical question: "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" So I think that Paul was referring to Jesus here in verse 14 as well. And he was emphasizing that he is our master and deserves our full submission. Romans 10:9 says that we must confess Jesus as Lord in order to be saved. There's no such thing as a Christian who receives Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. That's why Paul referred to Jesus with the word "Lord" so many times.

And that word fits very well here, because Paul went on to talk about something that the Lord commanded. The Greek word for commanded is used 16 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote six of them. Four of them are in this letter. We already saw the first one back in chapter 7 and verse 17. It just refers to a person giving instructions. And Jesus gave instructions about those who preach the gospel. The Greek word for preach is used 16 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote seven of them. Three of them are found in this letter. We already saw the first one back in chapter 2 and verse 1, where it's translated with the word "announcing" in the Christian Standard Bible. But it just refers to proclaiming something publicly.

And Paul was talking about those who publicly proclaim the gospel. The Greek word for gospel is the same one that we just saw in verse 12. It means "good news," and in the New Testament it always refers to good news about Jesus. That's very clear in verse 12, because there Paul was referring to the gospel of Christ. And I think it's obvious that he was still referring to the good news about Jesus here in verse 14 as well. Now last week we saw that Paul laid out the gospel very clearly in the beginning of chapter 15. It includes the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus. The death and resurrection are the focus,

but they are confirmed by the burial and the appearances. There's very strong proof that Jesus died and rose again. And Paul said that Jesus died for our sins. That's why he went to the cross; he paid the penalty for our sins so that we don't have to face God's judgment.

So this is the good news that Paul was talking about proclaiming here in chapter 9 and verse 14. And he said that "the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel." Now the phrase "earn their living" comes from a Greek word that usually just refers to living physically. For example, we saw this word back in chapter 7 and verse 39, where Paul said that "a wife is bound as long as her husband is living." But here in chapter 9 and verse 14 Paul was referring more specifically to the basis for living physically. How is it that we can continue to live physically? We need to eat and drink, which means that we need to work so that we can earn money to buy food and drink.

So Paul was talking about earning a living here, and he said that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel. The Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible have the word "from" instead of the word "by." But both of these words are basically communicating the same thing. The point is that those who preach the gospel should receive payment for their gospel ministry. Paul used the same Greek word for gospel that we just saw earlier in the verse. And obviously he was still referring to the good news about the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus. So those who devote their lives full time to the public proclamation of this good news should be paid by the church. And Paul said that this command comes from Jesus himself.

Now can we find this command anywhere in the Gospels? The answer is "yes." Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 10. In this chapter Jesus sent out his 12 disciples to proclaim the truth about his kingdom. But first he gave them some instructions. Look at what he said in verses 10–11: "Don't take a traveling bag for the road, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a staff, for the worker is worthy of his food. When you enter any town or village, find out who is worthy, and stay there until you leave." So Jesus told his disciples that they didn't need to bring supplies with them. And the reason he gave was that the worker is worthy of his food. Wherever the disciples went, they were to find someone to stay with and receive support from that person and probably anyone else they ministered to.

We see Jesus saying something similar in Luke's Gospel. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 10. In this chapter Jesus didn't send out his 12 disciples but 72 other disciples. And he gave them instructions that are very similar to what we just saw in Matthew's Gospel. Look at Luke 10:7–8: "Remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they offer, for the worker is worthy of his wages. Don't move from house to house. When you enter any town, and they welcome you, eat the things set before you." So once again Jesus taught that his disciples should expect to receive food and drink from the people they stayed with and ministered to. And the reason he gave was that the worker is worthy of his wages. In Matthew 10 Jesus said that the worker is worthy of his food, but here in Luke 10 he broadened the statement a bit. He said that the workers is worthy of his wages.

So these are the passages that Paul was referring to in 1 Corinthians 9:14. And in another place he actually quoted one of these verses. In 1 Timothy 5:17 he said that the elders who work hard at preaching and

teaching should receive double honor. And then in the next verse he explained what he meant by quoting Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7. He was referring to financial support. So in 1 Corinthians 9:13–14 Paul made the strongest possible argument that he and his fellow missionaries deserved financial support. He referred to the example of the priests in the Old Testament, and then he referred to the teaching of Jesus himself. And he said that Jesus actually commanded that his disciples receive financial support.

Now some liberal scholars think that Paul was basically admitting that he disobeyed the Lord. After all, Jesus commanded that men like Paul be given support, but as we saw in verse 12, Paul didn't accept it. So how should we explain this situation? We should recognize that the command is not really directed to those who deserve support but to those who are being ministered to. They have an obligation to support those who are ministering to them spiritually. So there was nothing wrong with Paul declining that support. But he wanted his readers to understand that they were right to offer support to Paul and his missionary team. So we need to make sure that we're obeying this command from Jesus. Are we giving generously to the church so that preachers and teachers of God's Word and the gospel can be supported? If we're not doing that, we need to start doing it right away. It may be difficult at first, but I can assure you that there is great joy in giving sacrificially to the Lord's work. Let's close in prayer.