

1 Cor 9 - "The Gospel: Free of Charge"

Small Group Notes

Opener: What was the biggest waste of money you ever purchased? What did you expect and what did you end up with?

Paul refers to the teachings of Jesus in this passage so it's important to have the background of the sending out of the 72 recorded by both Matthew and Luke (chapter 10 in both gospels). Note specifically Luke 10:7 - "The labourer deserves his wages."

Read 1 Cor 9:1-27

Q. What is Paul defending? Who is he defending and what are their "rights"?

A. Paul is defending himself first and foremost. It would seem that the Corinthian church is challenging his apostleship (Jesus' representative on Earth) because he's not doing it full time or because they're not paying him for it (and the expectation is that you pay your labourers). Paul draws in the other apostles and Jesus' actual half brothers to make his point. Their rights are to eat and drink and to provide for their wives (and by extension, children) - nothing more.

Q. Why do you suppose Paul lists "Cephas" separately? (Cephas is the Aramaic name for the Greek name Peter.)

A. The Corinthian church had an existing relationship with Peter (see 1:12) which is most likely why. I'm sure the conspiracy theorists could suggest a much more interesting reason (note also Mark 16:7).

Q. What are the 6 examples from life that Paul draws on for why a labourer deserves his wages?

A. I make it soldier, vineyard worker, shepherd, plowman, thresher and the temple worker.

Q. And the example from the Old Testament law means what exactly?

A. v9: "You shall not muzzle an Ox when it treads out the grain." God even cares about the ox being fed as it works, how much more does he care about man(kind)? (See also Matt 6:26).

Paul summarizes his point in verse 11: "If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things?"

Q. What is bizarre about Paul asking this question?

A. The question the Corinthian church is asking is exactly this same thing. "Why aren't we paying you?" Paul's made their point for them - the labourer deserves his wages!

Q. Why hasn't Paul (and whoever he refers to as "we" in verse 12b) taken advantage of this "right"?

A. He doesn't want to put an obstacle in the way of the gospel and he wants to present the gospel "free of charge" (v18).

Q. Why do you suppose that is?

I don't entirely know why Paul sees the need give up this right to get paid, but a contemporary example would be how people are put off by TV evangelists who seem to *only* be in it for the money. Paul certainly couldn't be accused of putting up his *own* agenda! The gospel is the centre of everything Paul does. I would certainly consider that Paul's 'poverty' is part of his being "all things to all people" (v22).

Q. Does verse 15 seem a little strange? What is Paul's ground for boasting?

A. In the context of the passage and in light of 1:31 ("boast in the Lord") Paul's boast is in the Gospel. So basically what v15 is saying is, "I would rather die than stop preaching the gospel!" Amen!

Q. So if not financial, what is Paul's reward?

A. v22: "I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings"

Close. How desperate are you to share the gospel? How can you serve the church and present a free of charge unhindered gospel to others? How and to whom is God calling you to minister?

Be reminded that God's word never fails - it always succeeds. Read Isaiah 55:11-12. The only way you can fail in ministry is by not doing it in the first place.