

1Co15 – When Your “Right” is Wrong – 1 Corinthians 9:1-23
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Open your Bibles. We’re back in our verse-by-verse study in 1 Corinthians. We are in 1 Corinthians 9:1-23. Title of the message, “When Your ‘Right’ is Wrong.”

It’s been some weeks since we’ve been in our verse-by-verse study of 1 Corinthians. So we have to back up to get the ball rolling on our subject today because Paul is still (today) in the same context and the same subject as he was in Chapter 8.

Our message in 1 Corinthians Chapter 8 was “Knowledge Versus Love.” And we made it clear in that chapter our knowledge on any given matter was *not* of highest importance and is *not* what should drive our actions. Instead our *love* for one another *must be* of highest importance and *must be* what drives our actions.

Jesus never said your *knowledge* will prove to the world that you are my disciples. He said ***Your LOVE for One Another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.***

And today Paul is staying on that exact same subject by using himself and his own actions as a perfect example of the teaching from the previous chapter. And this example from Paul’s own dealings with the Corinthians has to do with money – the Corinthians money – and so he knows the example should get their attention and it should get our attention too.

Even though this chapter does address financial support of pastors and Church leaders, that is not actually the primary point.

Paul is saying very clearly today,

He had a RIGHT to *RECEIVE Support* from the Corinthians.

He had a REASON to *REFUSE Support* from the Corinthians.

And Paul did *not* act on his “right” – instead he acted on his “love” and his concern for the Corinthians. Because exercising his “right” in this specific situation would have been wrong and would have done the church wrong.

Let’s pray. *Lord, we pray that we would see it. We need so badly to grasp this, that so often exercising our “right” can be so wrong. We pray Lord, that as Paul deals with this and as the surrounding subject is financial and money, we pray that we would see the bigger picture, that we don’t get to do what we do because we have a “right.” We can only do what we do because of our love for one another. We pray that you would show that to us. Bring it home to us today, in your name, Jesus, amen.*

Sometimes exercising your “right” is a very wrong thing to do. Maybe you’ve experienced that. If your “right” puts a stumbling block (obstacle) in the path of someone else trying to get to Christ then exercising your “right” is wrong.

We live in such a “me” culture. It’s all about *me*; it’s all about what *I want*. It’s all about *MY rights*. But as believers Living Life As The Church (the title of this series) what we have learned from this “me-centered” culture must be crucified. Living Life As The Church is *not* about what’s best for me. It’s *not* about getting *MY way – or my rights*.

Living life as the church is about *sacrificing self* and allowing God to get *his way*. And it’s all about *not* being a hindrance (road-block) to what God is trying to do in someone else’s life.

If we’re hindering somebody – if we have this “this is what I want. This is what I’m going to do. This is my right” and it causes an offense, a stumbling block, a hindrance to someone else then we are very wrong exercising our rights.

In the precious chapter Paul says this,

1 Corinthians 8:9 (NLT)

9 But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble.

Yes, you have freedoms and you have rights. But today the Bible is going to say... *so what?* This is a wonderful thing for a Christian to learn, these words – *so what?* So what if it’s my right? So what if it’s what I want? So what if I think it’s what’s best? My opinion, honestly, just doesn’t matter. And when we grasp that we say, “Okay Lord, now replace mine with yours. Replace *my rights* with *your will*. Replace my rights with love for one another.” And then our lives become transformed and big, radical things start happening. As a Christ-follower your “right” is NOT the issue. The issue is your concern for the *spiritual good* of those around you.

And that is the truth that Paul is now going to illustrate from his own life – over and over again today.

1 Corinthians 9:1 (NLT)

1 Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven’t I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn’t it because of my work that you belong to the Lord?

These are all obviously “rhetorical questions” all with obvious *yes* answers. Because of all of these *yes* answers, he obviously had rights. That’s what he is getting at.

And Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 9:2-3.

1 Corinthians 9:2-3 (NLT)

2 Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you. You yourselves are proof (the seal) that I am the Lord's apostle.

3 This is my answer to those who question my authority.

Obviously there were those who *were* questioning Paul's authority and so he says to the church – **YOU are the proof** (SEAL) that I am the **Lord's Apostle**. And in verse 3 Paul says ***This Spiritual and eternal FRUIT -is my answer to those who question my authority***

Paul had to deal so much with the Corinthians about his own authority. They were constant "problem children." He had more trouble with the church of Corinth than any other church he started. He spent more time there than any other church in the New Testament. He wrote more letters to the Corinthians than any other church. He had so much trouble because they were a metropolitan, "anything goes," very wealthy, sex oriented culture. They were fickle and they were always quick to run after other leaders, which is most likely why Paul did what he did here regarding money here, and most likely why he's using it as an example and most likely why he worked there without financial support (which we'll see in a minute).

Now that Paul has nailed down his *true leadership* over the church, now he gets to his "rights."

1 Corinthians 9:4-5 (NLT)

4 Don't we (Apostles) have the right to live in your homes and share your meals?

This was the normal custom of caring for travelling preachers and teachers.

5 Don't we have the right to bring a believing wife with us as the other apostles and the Lord's brothers do, and as Peter does?

Again the normal custom was for the Apostles to travel with their wives and they both would be cared for by the church. And he points out the Lord's actual brothers (James and Jude) brought their wives with them – as did Peter.

We see two things here that contradict Catholic Church tradition.

1) Jesus had half brothers (Mary was not a perpetual virgin)

2) The first Pope (Peter) was married.

But the real point is Paul and Barnabas had the right to be taken care of by the church which Paul addresses – *sarcastically* – in 1 Corinthians 9:6.

1 Corinthians 9:6 (NLT)

6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves?

The obvious answer (to Paul’s sarcasm) is that Paul and Barnabas had the same “right” as the other Apostles and leaders.

We are going to get to *why* Paul was not exercising his “right” in a minute. But first Paul seems to really want to drive this point home so now he’s going to explain his “rights” by using three examples from “ordinary life.”

1 Corinthians 9:7 (NLT)

7 What soldier has to pay his own expenses (none)? What farmer plants a vineyard and doesn’t have the right to eat some of its fruit (none)? What shepherd cares for a flock of sheep and isn’t allowed to drink some of the milk (none)?

The soldier, the farmer, the shepherd – their needs are all met by their efforts and so certainly it is the same with the leaders of the church.

And then Paul uses an example from the Law of Moses to continue to drive his point home.

1 Corinthians 9:8-10 (NLT)

8 Am I expressing merely a human opinion, or does the law say the same thing?

9 For the law of Moses says, “You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain (Deut 25:4).” Was God thinking only about oxen when he said this?

10 Wasn’t he actually speaking to us? Yes, it was written for us, so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest.

I think he’s making his point pretty clear here. But just to be sure, Paul’s going to connect these truths to himself (and those who lead the church).

1 Corinthians 9:11 (NLT)

11 Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren’t we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink?

The obvious answer is *yes* and we can say – *Alright Paul, we get it.*

So, although the financial care for the leaders of the Church is really *not* Paul's *primary point* there, it is obviously a big deal to him, and it can still be a very big deal today because it can cause big problems in the Church.

Our Church culture sees two extremes in the area of money. On one hand, there are the celebrity megachurch pastors. I did some Google work yesterday on the richest pastors in America, and it was a little bit surprising. Average salary for the celebrity pastor, salary plus royalties, is well over a million dollars a year. Most of them are in the ten to twenty million dollar net worth range. Except for some.

There are some that really, really stand against this. One, is Rick Warren. If you know Rick. Rick stopped taking a salary from his church as soon as his book was published and last I heard he had re-paid the church every penny that they had ever paid him. Of course his royalties from his books keep food on his table. But he just stopped taking money from his church and I admire him a lot for that. He gets some flack, from some people in our Movement, but that's a big deal.

Francis Chan also as big on this. David Platt. There's some of these big megachurch guys that really "get it." But there are some that don't. Let's just say they make a lot of money.

And then on the other side of that, at the other extreme there's small town church America where 98% of the pastors in this country live barely from paycheck to paycheck. They're just scraping it out and they plan. Their retirement plan is to die in poverty for the Lord. That is the greatest, by far, the greatest percentage of pastors. And neither of those is really right.

We as a Movement, the Calvary Chapel Movement, we try to strike a balance there. We do our best to be careful not to overdo or under do. For what it's worth, I don't remember ever saying this before, but after seventeen years of my entire family's full time efforts – not one person, but five for much of our seventeen years here – we've worked overwhelmingly and I today make about 70% of what I was making when I started the church. So, I still live about a third under what we were living on before we came to start the church.

The best I can remember, last salary raise here was about thirteen years ago. And it's okay because the church really does care for us. God has really met all of our needs. We married two daughters, I mean, we paid for weddings! If you've done that, you know, it's no small deal! You don't just get change out of your bedroom jar and pay for a wedding.

And so I was thinking about all the incredible things that God has done, and how he's blessed us. And one day a guy walks into my house in August, and it's like 120 degrees in my house. "Why is it so hot?" I said, "Well, you know, the air conditioner is not working." And the next day there's a guy there putting a new A/C in my house. So that's the kind of thing that we see and we trust and we watch God do miracles.

And so I'm not complaining. I'm just telling you that this is an issue. There was a time in this church where a youth leader, in his youthfulness, was convincing the other leaders that I shouldn't get a *salary at all*. That the church should pay for a roof, clothing and food, and that anything else I needed I should bring to the church and ask the church for it and then wait until someone in the church gave that to me. So (fortunately) he's gone and I still get a paycheck. And, again, I'm not complaining. I'm just telling you, this is the way it is and it's okay. It's good. But I figured this is such a side subject that I'll mention it personally a minute.

Again, the right for a church leader to be supported by the church is *not actually* the primary point of this chapter. And so Paul is going to start to get to his primary point in 1 Corinthians 9:12.

1 Corinthians 9:12 (NLT)

12 If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? (Another rhetorical question with an obvious "yes" answer - and then [finally] – Paul starts to get to his Main Point) ***But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News (The Gospel) about Christ.***

The point is this: that his "right" didn't dictate his actions. His love for the church dictated his actions. And in this situation, at this time and place in Corinth, if he would have exercised his right to receive support from the church it would have been a very wrong thing to do. Because he would have been associated with the false apostles and the false teachers who were working the city of Corinth in order to get money. And so Paul says, "listen, I have a right to this, but for your good I won't do it. I refuse to do it – not because I don't need to eat, but because it would cause you to stumble because you would lump me in with those people."

Paul had a RIGHT to *RECEIVE support* from the Corinthians –
Paul had a REASON to *REFUSE support* from the Corinthians.

And the *reason* for him to *refuse* support outweighed his “right” to *receive* support. Paul is using himself and his “right” to receive support as a powerful example that (as Christians) we are called to give up our “right” if there is *any chance at all* that our “rights” would cause someone else to stumble or be a hindrance to someone else either receiving Christ or being encouraged or growing in Christ, and might become an obstacle to someone else who is trying to get to Jesus. That’s what Paul is getting at. We are called to give up our rights for the sake of the Gospel and for the sake of the greater (eternal) purposes of God.

And in our church culture we have a hard time with that. Christians, Bible believing, heaven bound, church attending Christians might sit in the Pastor’s office and say, “yeah but, I have a right to do that.” And that pastor might say (with a grin that my family doesn’t like) “So what? So what if you have a right?” And most of those people leave the church. They really do. They’re like, “what do you mean ‘so what?’ How could you say that to me?”

“I said it nicely. But the Bible says, ‘so what?’ So what if you have a right? Is that what’s best for that other person? Is that what’s best for the Kingdom’s sake? Is that what’s best for God’s plan and for God’s purpose? Not – is it your right? We give up our rights for the sake of the Gospel.”

That’s what Paul’s talking about to make sure that we’re not an obstacle to someone reaching Christ. So we know that this means that there was a chance that if Paul had received that money from Corinth that it would have caused someone to stumble. We assume it’s because of what Paul calls the “super-apostles,” again, sarcastically – the false apostles, the false teachers.

Look at the intensity Paul uses later to describe this situation.

2 Corinthians 11:7–8 (NLT)

7 Was I wrong when I humbled myself and honored you by preaching God’s Good News to you without expecting anything in return?

8 I “robbed” other churches by accepting their contributions so I could serve you at no cost.

This tells the whole story right here. It was the Philippian church covering Paul’s expenses while he ministered to the Corinthians for *free*. Paul says he was willing to “rob” that church, meaning use their support to minister to the Corinthian church. It’s not that Paul refused support from *all* churches, it’s that there was something in Corinth that caused Paul to say – “Not here, not in Corinth.”

“Because of the Situation here – even though it would be ‘RIGHT’ for the church to support me, INSTEAD, I’m going to make sure they don’t support me SO THAT I won’t risk being an OBSTACLE to the Gospel here”

Do you see the example for our own lives there? Can you apply that to your life, to someplace where you would say, “I have a right to do this, but for the sake of the Gospel, and for the sake of Jesus Christ in this person’s life, I won’t. I won’t exercise my right in this situation because it would be wrong.”

That’s what the subject is. It’s not really about pastors getting paid. It’s about us giving up our rights in any situation that might cause someone else to stumble or might be a roadblock to someone else reaching Christ.”

Amazingly, Paul is still not done with his examples. So he’s going to throw in two more examples (for good measure) leading up to him making his main point – *again*.

1 Corinthians 9:13-14 (NLT)

13 Don’t you realize that those who work in the temple get their meals from the offerings brought to the temple? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings.

14 In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it.

The Levites who worked in the temple had the same “right” that Paul had in Corinth and the Lord Jesus even ordered ***that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it*** (Mat 10:9-10).

And we would say, “Yeah Pau, we get that part.” But he’s just building up to making his main point, again.

1 Corinthians 9:15 (NLT)

15 Yet I have never used any of these rights (there’s the M.I.P.). And I am not writing this to suggest that I want to start now. In fact, I would rather die than lose my right to boast about preaching without charge.

Paul was determined to set himself apart from the false apostles by never asking for a penny and he did and it did set him apart. It cost him his rights but it assured him of his place in the eternal work of the Gospel in Corinth and it assured him of *not* being an obstacle (stumbling block) on the path to people truly coming to Jesus.

Paul had the option to either receive or refuse financial support from the Corinthians. But he did not have the option to *not preach* the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:16 (NLT)

16 Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News!

WOE unto me – if I do NOT Preach the Gospel!

One version says – ***I am DOOMED if I don't preach the Good News!***

Paul had the *right* to receive financial support and he gave up that right. But he was compelled by God *to preach the Gospel* and *that* he could never give up.

And Paul continues his “no choice” obedience in 1 Corinthians 9:17.

1 Corinthians 9:17 (NLT)

17 If I were doing this on my own initiative, I would deserve payment (meaning his “right” to support). ***But I have no choice, for God has given me this sacred trust.***

Paul's saying I have no choice but to serve you in this way by bringing the Gospel message to you and so if it is best for you that I receive no support from you, it doesn't matter. I still must serve you in this way because God has given me this *sacred trust*.

And so we read this in 1 Corinthians 9:18.

1 Corinthians 9:18 (NLT)

18 What then is my pay? It is the opportunity to preach the Good News without charging anyone. That's why I never demand my rights when I preach the Good News.

My reward (my pay) is the opportunity to preach the true Gospel to you – that is why I never demand my “rights” when I preach. The opportunity to do what I've been called to do without being a stumbling block is my reward.

And he wraps it up incredibly well in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22.

1 Corinthians 9:19-22 (NLT)

19 Even though I am a free man with no master, I have (willingly)(I make myself) ***become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ.***

20 When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law.

21 When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.

22 When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some.

Those verses are so huge and we need to see how this applies perfectly to our lives.

Paul says it is never about *my rights*. I am willing to become a slave to all people in order to be used by God to *bring many to Christ*.

Eugene Peterson translates a portion of these verses like this.

I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life

Do you see it? We have got to see it.

If your “rights” are going to (in any way) hinder someone else from “coming to” or “growing” Christ then you exercising your “right” *is wrong*.

Do we even ask ourselves these questions?

Do we ask ourselves:

WHERE is this person coming from?

HOW can I best relate to them?

WHAT might offend them even if it is my “right?”

Do we even ask ourselves these questions? Or do we just exercise our “right” because it's our *right*?

And so because of Paul living out this incredible example in his life when we read our last verse today, we absolutely *believe it*.

1 Corinthians 9:23 (NLT)

23 I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

Indeed you do Paul.

You do everything in the light of spreading the Gospel message. You do everything through the filter of how best can you *represent* Jesus Christ and lead the people around

you to Christ or encourage them to grow – in Christ and may we commit to do the *exact same thing*.

Let's pray. *Lord, Jesus, would you remind us by your Spirit that we can be a hindrance to the Gospel, that we can be full of faith and Bible knowledge and be completely in your way? And that we can be a stumbling block, an obstacle to someone else reaching you. And especially if we act always on our rights, on our freedoms, on our knowledge. Instead, Lord, may we always act on love for one another – those in the church and outside the church. May we always be driven by the message of the Gospel. May we always act and react in light of the Gospel. And may we be willing, Lord, to suffer the loss of our rights at all times for the good of someone else. May we crucify that disastrous me-centered nature that we would live and react and act in other's best interests. We pray that you would inspire us, that you would supernaturally transform us to this, to your image, for your glory and in your name, Jesus, amen.*