

9:1-2: *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, yet at least I am to you; for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.*

The previous chapter closed by saying “*if meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh for evermore.*” If certain practices offended fellow Christians, Paul did not engage in them. In this chapter he illustrated this fact from his own Christian life. It was “necessary to praise himself (for this is the way the Corinthians were to be set straight), but he does not want to make great claims for himself” (The Church’s Bible, p. 146).

This chapter begins by asking four questions, all of which are rhetorical (a positive answer is expected). If the ASV is compared with the KJV, readers quickly realize that the first two questions are reversed (this is due to a variation in some manuscripts). Staying with the ASV translation, Paul first asked these Christians if he was “*not free.*” Then he asked if he was not an “*apostle*” (“*Am I*” is used twice in verse 1 and in each instance it is a present tense verb). Paul also asked if he had “*not seen Jesus our Lord.*” *Seen (horao)* is used four other times in the book to describe people seeing Jesus (1 Cor. 15:5, 6, 7, 8—see the KJV for all these references). Finally he asked these Christians if they were not His “*work in the Lord.*” Since “*are*” is a present tense verb in verses 1 and 2, and it is joined with “*in the Lord*” in each of these verses, we find an illustration of 1 Jn. 1:7. No Christian is perfect, but as long as a child of God is trying to live in the right way (and this includes repentance when he sins), a child of God remains “in Christ.” That is, Christians are not taken out Christ when they sin and then put back in the Lord when they repent. God’s people “stand in the grace of God” (Rom. 5:2) unless they “make shipwreck” of it (1 Tim. 1:19 and compare 1 Tim. 4:1). The Corinthians were still “in Christ.”

Paul was a *free (eleutheros)* man (the opposite of a slave). This thought may include the “freedom” Jesus described in Jn. 8:32, 36. It certainly means Paul was not under any obligation to another human being (he had no earthly master—verse 19). He also had complete freedom in morally neutral matters (these are matters of judgment and opinion). He was also an *apostle* (this meant he had rights, power and authority). Paul had to prove these rights to the Corinthians before claiming he surrendered some of them for the benefit of others (we cannot forfeit what we do not have). We may have no reservations about Paul’s authority, but some at Corinth did question Paul’s power (perhaps the questions were based on his not having been one of the original apostles). Thus, he showed by the four questions in verse 1 that he did have an apostleship and religious authority.

We do not know who questioned Paul’s authority (2a), but the claims must have been very forceful and at least somewhat persuasive to those who heard them. Perhaps a false teacher had come to Corinth when Paul was not there and said Paul was a deceiver and had no power or authority. In fact, a false teacher may have said he (or she) was the true spokesperson for God. While Paul’s opponents likely wanted to claim he was “just in it for the money,” this claim could not be made because Paul had refused financial support from the Corinthians (verses 12, 15, 18). Since Paul’s opposition could not say he “was preaching for the money,” they questioned why he did not exercise the rights of an apostle (compare verses 4-5). Knowing that Paul was attacked by others should encourage all faithful Christians today. God’s best servants are often subjected to baseless attacks by the hands of thoughtless or ill-intentioned people.

One of the specific charges against Paul was “not having seen Jesus” (1b). This allegation may or may not have been true. Jesus was seen throughout the area of Palestine, so Paul may have seen the Lord or even spoken to Him. In the grand scheme of things it does not matter if Paul ever interacted with Jesus during the Lord’s earthly ministry because Paul was a special case (1 Cor. 15:8). With the other apostles it was necessary to have been involved with Jesus from the time of John the Baptist to the time of the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). It was also necessary to have been a “witness of His resurrection.” The other apostles had to meet these requirements so they could bear “witness” to what had happened (Lk. 24:48). Paul was unique in his apostleship: Jesus personally called him and made him a “*chosen vessel*” (Acts 9:15; 1 Cor. 1:1) while he was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6). Paul knew and told people he was specially chosen by the Lord and endowed with apostolic authority (Gal. 1:15-16). Thus, when he wrote

to Timothy (2 Timothy 1:12) he said, *I know whom I have believed*, not I know *what* I have believed. In the Galatian letter (Gal. 2:7-9) Paul said other well known Christians had accepted him and his work.

Paul had seen Jesus, his evangelistic work was approved by other well-known Christians, and those at Corinth were his “*work in the Lord*” (1c). In other words, the Corinthian church resulted from his labor (compare Matt. 7:16-20). Had it not been for him, this congregation would not have been started/established (see Acts 18:1-11 and 1 Cor. 3:5-10). Paul realized some did not consider him an apostle (verse 2) and realized people had questions about his authority. He found it puzzling and troubling that the Corinthians would have questions about him because he helped found this congregation. His personal labor and attention were so evident he said in 2 Cor. 3:2 that these Christians were his “letter of recommendation.” In view of this fact Paul said that even if others did not consider him an apostle (perhaps he was thinking of Christians in other congregations), the Corinthians had to regard him as an apostle. It was through him that these Christians had found Christ and changed their lives (1 Cor. 6:9-11). He was writing to people who knew the facts; all they had to do was remember how he had helped them. In the Second Corinthian letter (12:12) he said “*Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works.*” Rienecker and Rogers (p. 413) said “*to others*” means “in the estimation of others.” Most have opinions about others, but having an opinion does not mean it is true or right.

In the middle of verse 2 Paul said he had a “*seal*” for his “apostleship.” Of the sixteen times *seal* (*sphragis*) is used in the New Testament, thirteen of them are in the book of Revelation (these passages occur between Rev. 5:1 and 9:4). Here *seal* means the church at Corinth was a “legal attestation or attesting sign” to Paul’s apostleship (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:317). Since “seals were quite commonly used in antiquity in both private and public life and were of great legal significance” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:316), this proof was not just “evidence” of Paul being an apostle. It was absolute and indisputable proof. Moreover, since the Corinthians were *in the Lord* due to Paul, there could be no doubt that his work was associated with God. The existence of this congregation and the spiritual state of these Christians proved what some were denying.

Barclay (First Corinthians, p. 87) noted how in “ancient days the seal was extremely important. When a cargo of grain or dates or the like was being sent off, the last thing that was done was that the bags and sacks and cases were sealed with a seal to show that the consignment was genuinely what it claimed to be. When a will was made it was sealed with seven seals; and it was not legally valid unless it was produced with the seven seals intact. The seal was the guarantee of genuineness. The very fact of the Corinthian Church was the guarantee of Paul’s apostleship.”

“*Apostleship*” (*apostole*) in 2b is a relatively rare word in the New Testament. Aside from here it occurs only in Acts 1:25; Rom. 1:5; Gal. 2:8. “Apostles were central leaders of the church; they and the prophets were the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). Consequently, certain rights, freedoms, and responsibilities came with the office. In a very powerful sense, Paul was in charge of the church, not the other way around” (Holman, 7:145). Although it is not stated here, another proof for Paul’s apostleship was his *apostolic power* (compare 2 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 15:18-19).

9:3: *My defence to them that examine me is this.*

Paul was being “*examined*” by some people and he had a “*defence*” (“*answer*,” KJV) for his critics (both of these terms are unique and important). *Defence* (*apologia*) has the sense of a “critical investigation.” It is the type of investigation that would justify someone obtaining a legal defense to respond to charges (Peter used this same word in 1 Pet. 3:15). This term “underlies the theological term apologetics, ‘defense of the Faith.’ It is necessary for the gospel to be defended against those who would oppose it or falsify it” (CBL, GED, 1:386). *Examined* (*anakrino*) described a preliminary examination before a trial. It may be thought of as “scrutinous ‘judgment’” (CBL, GED, 1:228). Here it is a present tense verb and Thayer (p. 39) associated it with a judge who holds an investigation or interrogates “*the accused* or *the witness*.” Back in 4:3 (see the commentary on 4:3-4) Paul said such investigations were a “small thing” to him.

By using the words *defence* and *examine* we know that one or more people at Corinth had raised some very serious questions, allegations, or charges against this apostle. Based on the information in chapters 8 and 10, at least some of the allegations involved meat sacrificed to idols. Paul “is here not proving to doubters or questioners that he is truly an apostle. His letter is not to be sent to the address of the ‘others’ who know nothing about him but to the Corinthians. Nor is the question at issue this, whether Paul is an apostle or not; the Corinthians raise no such question, for they themselves are Paul’s seal of apostleship. The question on which Paul proposes to stand an examination is the one regarding Christian liberty, whether he has this liberty to the fullest degree and yet in practice can exercise all manner of restraint. In order to answer this question Paul is writing to the Corinthians; this he wants to clear up for them. And in this effort he uses himself as an example” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 353).

Because Paul used the present tense to describe his inquisitors, we know charges were being made against him again and again (there was little hope of the questions going away any time soon). Paul “does not admit that the Corinthians have the right to institute such an inquiry, he merely accepts the inquiry, even welcomes it” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 353). Since a Christian like Paul was criticized by people, we can expect the same in our Christian lives (compare 2 Tim. 3:12).

Although Paul had various rights (personal liberties) because he was a free man and an apostle (verses 1-2), he said in the following verses he renounced some of these rights to benefit others (compare verse 22). Paul basically conducted his own “judicial inquiry.” He raised the issues being discussed among the Corinthians and then answered all the objections against him in a masterful presentation.

9:4-6: *Have we no right to eat and to drink? 5 Have we no right to lead about a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or I only and Barnabas, have we not a right to forbear working?*

These verses list some of the rights Paul had but chose not to use. In the ASV the text says “*right*” and the KJV says “*power*.” This word (*exousia*) is used in verses 4, 5, 6, as well as in 9:12, 18; 11:10; 15:24. It also occurs in places like Jn. 1:12; there the ASV again uses the word “*right*” and the KJV again uses the word “*power*.” Brown’s definition for *right* (*exousia*) in 1 Cor. 9:4 is quite good: “Because of his spiritual ministry as a servant in the church, an apostle has the right to have his physical needs looked after by the church.” Here as well as 2 Thess. 3:9 (where the same topic is discussed), *right* “means a right or prerogative” (ibid).

Paul first asked if he and others (“*we*”) did not have the *right* to “*eat and drink*.” This cannot be literal as *eat and drink* are both aorist tense verbs. Paul used a metonymy (eating and drinking represent something--*financial support*). This was nice way of saying, “accepting money from a local congregation”). Paul discussed this subject again in verses 12, 15, 18. Although Paul had the right to take pay from the Corinthians for preaching the gospel, this right was not used (he supported himself, Acts 18:1-3, and he received funds from other congregations, 2 Cor. 11:7-9). Since Paul had paid his own way, his critics could not allege he was “preaching for the money.” It is true that some ministers want to “make an easy living” on “church work,” but dedicated evangelists are not in the ministry to get rich. If men are truly God’s servants, they are more interested in “giving” (Mk. 9:37) than “receiving” (Mk. 9:34).

In order for Paul’s argument to be effective, the Corinthians had to agree that preachers are entitled to support. If those at Corinth refused to agree that ministers are entitled to pay, Paul’s argument was useless. Thus, Paul went to great lengths in this chapter to show that ministers are to be paid or at least offered compensation for their work. Paul not only said paying ministers is right, the following verses say paying preachers is necessary (verses 7-14). Verse 4 refers to financially supporting preachers, not the eating idol meat discussed in chapter 8.

Receiving support for teaching the gospel could have reminded some Christians of paganism (pagan priests received part of the sacrifices brought by worshippers). In fact, they had so much meat they had to sell some of it and this often left them quite wealthy. False religion had made many priests rich. Paul seems to have been well aware of this activity so he refused to accept money from the Corinthians and thus distinguished himself from the idolatrous priests. He went to the opposite extreme and said, “Pay me

nothing.” He drew a clear and firm line between himself and others. Unfortunately those who opposed him used his good deed to make allegations against him.

A second right Paul had but refused to use is found in verse 5 (he was allowed to be married and have a family). Additionally, had he used this right, the congregation where he worked would have been responsible for paying him enough money to support his family. He did not use these rights, but he did have them.

In previous generations some have taken the information in verse 5 and attempted to justify *companionship* with someone who was not their spouse. In many cases priests and monks took women to be their “companions.” These women were regarded as “assistants in missionary work,” “companions to provide company,” or people to “help with the cooking,” etc. These women were not wives—they were called *sisters, beloved, and companions*. Justification for this practice came from the words “lead about” and the idea that “wife” can simply mean “woman.” It was even claimed that Jesus left us an example of this (Lk. 8:1-3).

It is true that “*lead about*” (*periago*) meant “*lead around with oneself/have with oneself*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:73). It is also true that the word translated “*wife*” (*gune*) sometimes meant *woman* (1 Cor. 11:5). However, verse 5 does not mean or justify traveling missionaries having an unmarried female traveling companion. Certainly women did accompany Jesus, but it was not the Lord alone (the apostles were also part of this group, Lk. 8:1). When an unmarried man and an unmarried woman travel together (unless there is a significant age difference or other unique factors), there is the potential for many (and serious) problems (compare Phil. 2:15).

Verse 5 presents us with some practical points of application. First, ministers may be married (just like everyone else, they are bound by God’s marriage law in Mt. 19:9). Second, those who preach are entitled to enough pay to support their families. It is wrong to offer a minister a salary below what is a livable income. Rather than ask a minister “How much do you need?” or “How little can you live on?”, elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7) should consider what is fair and adequate compensation. A good general rule is that a preacher’s salary should be at least the average amount in the congregation where he works.

Paul’s right to be married demonstrates the error of celibacy (a Catholic doctrine). God “first set apostles in the church” (1 Cor. 12:28). If the “first” could be married with God’s approval, any Christian is entitled to marry if the instructions in Mt. 19:9 are followed. Here we are also told Peter had a wife (compare Mt. 8:14), she was allowed to be with him, and the two of them were to be supported in their church work. The “*rest of the apostles*” were also entitled to find a marriage partner (compare 1 Tim. 4:1-3).

In describing wives Paul said “*a believer*” (the KJV says a “*sister*”). Due to this description many have automatically concluded a Christian must marry a Christian (for reasons why this view cannot be right, see the commentary on 1 Cor. 7:14a, 39-40 and 2 Cor. 6:14). If this passage said, “Have we no right to read a book that is 100 pages long,” we would not infer that it is wrong to read a book that is 200 pages long. Paul meant having a Christian wife was the wisest and best choice and this part of the verse suggests he believed it was very important for a Christian to marry a fellow Christian. After all, he did not want to provide anyone with an objection to his work and ministry (2 Cor. 6:3), so his personal choice would have been a Christian wife. It would have been “lawful” for him and others to marry an unsaved mate, but it would not have been “expedient” (1 Cor. 6:12 and see the commentary on that verse).

At the end of verse 5 Paul referred to the “*brethren of the Lord, and Cephas*” (Peter is mentioned last). Putting Peter at the end of the thought offers no support for the idea that Peter was the “first pope” (for more information on why Peter was not a pope see the commentary on Mt. 8:14-15 in section 11 of the Gospels commentary and the commentary on Mt. 16:18 in section 22 of the Gospels commentary).

Catholic doctrine suffers another blow because this verse tells us Peter was married. A third Catholic error refuted in verse 5 is the idea that Mary was a “perpetual virgin” (i.e. Mary never had sexual intercourse with Joseph after the Lord’s birth). Paul said there were *the brethren of the Lord*. Mary gave birth to children other than Jesus (compare Mt. 12:46-47; 13:55; Mk. 3:31-32; 6:3; Lk. 8:19; Jn. 2:12; 7:3, 5; Acts 1:14; Gal. 1:19). Here Paul indicates the Lord’s fleshly brothers became involved with “church work” and were also paid for their labor. Paul may have mentioned Peter because some of the Corinthians

thought highly of him (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22).

In verse 6 Paul said he and “Barnabas” (another preacher) had the “right” (power, KJV) to “forbear working.” These preachers didn’t need to work at a secular job to support themselves because preachers are supposed to be paid. The NKJV implies that Paul and Barnabas *did not* have the right to forego secular employment (“Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?”). This translation obscures the thought but the Greek text is very clear. In the original text Paul used two double negatives. This sentence construction would be equivalent to “Do we not have the right to *not* go to a restaurant after worship?” The obvious answer is “yes.” Those involved with full time ministry are entitled to avoid working in the secular world so they can focus their time and attention on “church work.” It is very possible that Paul and Barnabas had been singled out for some reason as preachers who did not deserve pay. Now it was time for the Corinthians to consider some things that are implied but not stated in the text. That is, had Paul and Barnabas worked less than others? Had they somehow been unfaithful? Had they given any indication God was not pleased with their work? Was there something that obligated them to work at a secular job while other ministers did not? A small amount of additional information on the word “work” (*ergazomai*) is available in the commentary on verse 13.

This is the first time Barnabas is mentioned since his disruption with Paul described in Acts 15:36-40. It seems Paul made an “incidental allusion” to Barnabas. Certainly this brief reference shows the apostle’s high regard for this faithful brother. Earlier Barnabas had sold some of his possessions to help needy saints in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36-37). It seems he, too, refused to take pay for the church work he did (perhaps he did this on his missionary journey with Paul, Acts 13:1-3).

In this chapter we find five reasons to pay ministers; the first is found in verses 4-6 (pay had been given to other religious workers). A second proof is presented in the following verses: Soldiers, vine-planters, and shepherds (people who work in other fields) are paid for their efforts.

9:7: *What soldier ever serveth at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?*

As stated at the end of the commentary on verse 6, Paul introduced three illustrations to show that workers deserve to be paid. He first appealed to the military (no “soldier” goes to war at his own expense—he is supplied with the necessary equipment and is paid to fight). If a soldier in the military deserves pay, what is true for a full-time soldier in the Lord’s army? Of course, there are sometimes exceptions to this rule (some conflicts have been fought by volunteers). *Soldier* (*strateuomai*) is a present tense verb and it is translated “goeth a warfare” in the KJV. Aside from here the term is found only in Lk. 3:14; 2 Cor. 10:3; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:4; Jas. 4:1; 1 Pet. 2:11. “In the Epistles Paul drafted the originally secular term into the service of the gospel. He used it to describe the Christian’s life as a soldier with supreme allegiance to Jesus Christ who is engaged in divine warfare. In 1 Corinthians 9:7 Paul noted by a rhetorical question that he should not be expected to work for nothing any more than one would expect a soldier to” (CBL, GED, 6:126). The word “charges” (*opsonion*) occurs only here, Lk. 3:14; Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 11:8. Here it is a “metaphor for the care (actually) owed to the apostle by the congregation” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:555).

A second illustration is drawn from a landowner who plants a vineyard. All knew the landowner would be among the first to taste and enjoy the vineyard’s fruits. Since this was accepted practice (be sure to read Deut. 20:6), why was it wrong to pay a man who planted and helped nourish the churches of Christ? Paul had planted many vineyards (congregations) and was, therefore, deserving of pay. “Plant” (*phuteuo*) is a present tense verb, and it is the term Paul used earlier in a spiritual sense (see 1 Cor. 3:6, 7, 8—the word occurs in all three of these verses).

A third and final illustration was based on shepherds who cared for a “flock.” Those in charge of a flock get to “eat” the milk. Careful students of the text will wonder why Paul did not say “drink the milk.” He may have used the word *eat* because milk is turned into butter and cheese. In oriental countries it is common for shepherds to be paid with a portion of the milk (Willis, p. 234). If those who care for flocks receive compensation, what about those who work with the flock of God (the church, Acts 20:28-

29)? Paul had “nurtured many lambs” (Christians) and was thus entitled to support. The verb translated “*feedeth*” (*poimaino*) is also used of church leaders (elders) in Acts 20:28 (they are to “feed the church of the Lord”). The argument based on shepherds, as well as the preceding two illustrations, was related to daily life. Paul’s second set of arguments for paying preachers is based on the Old Testament and is found in verses 8-10.

Some have thought Paul was not so much concerned about the Corinthians’ paying preachers, but *paying them enough*. It has been said that Paul’s question in verse 1 (“*Am I not an apostle?*”) meant Paul deserved more money than an “average” minister. While this is possible, it does not seem consistent with the rest of the New Testament. Such a view also seems to be contrary to Paul’s main thought. His point was: Pay those who labor, not “pay them according to their skill.”

Today most congregations will not question whether or not it is right to provide support for a minister. What is most pressing is *how much to pay him*. No New Testament writer set an amount. We do, however, find principles that help answer this question—principles such as the golden rule in Mt. 7:12. If we were ministering, we would want enough income to have a livable wage. We would seek enough to maintain a living standard consistent with others in the congregation where we work. If the members of a congregation treat its minister and his family as they want to be treated, and the minister is acting as a Christian should act, both he and the congregation have the potential to remain together for many years and truly appreciate one another.

Jesus said in Lk. 10:7: “A laborer is worthy of his hire.” Church members need to be taught that preaching is *work*. Much of the work may not be seen by many members (all they may see is the preaching and teaching), but ministers usually do many things and they have a God-given role of “studying” so they will “save themselves and those who hear them” (1 Tim. 4:16). Paul said those who are “taught in the word” need to pay their teacher (Gal. 6:6). There is no Biblical basis for ministers taking a “vow of poverty” or the idea that “all preachers should be poor.” If a man is “just preaching for the money,” he stands condemned (compare 1 Tim. 6:5).

Someone has said: “The preacher teaches, though he must solicit his own classes. He heals, though without pills or knife. He is sometimes a lawyer, often a social worker, something of an editor, a bit of a philosopher and entertainer, a salesman, a decorative piece for public functions, and he supposed to be a scholar. He visits the sick, marries people, buries the dead, labors to console those who sorrow and admonish those who sin, and tries to stay nice when criticized for not doing his duty. He plans programs, appoints committees when he can get them, spends considerable time in keeping people out of each other’s hair. Between times he prepares a sermon and preaches it on Sunday to those who don’t happen to have any other engagement.” Yes, preachers deserve to be paid.

9:8-10: *Do I speak these things after the manner of men? or saith not the law also the same? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. Is it for the oxen that God careth, 10 or saith he it assuredly for our sake? Yea, for our sake it was written: because he that ploweth ought to plow in hope, and he that thresheth, to thresh in hope of partaking.*

In the previous verses Paul did not use the Scriptures to prove that preachers should be paid. His argument was based upon custom (practice). Here he affirmed that paying preachers is also taught in God’s word. Paul believed the Scriptures must be consulted and applied to life (Gal. 4:30), just as Jesus did (Lk. 10:25-26). The CBL (First Corinthians, p. 365) said, “Paul wanted to make it clear that he was not speaking from the standpoint of human wisdom alone. Some might have accused him of this on the basis of his previous ‘natural’ illustrations. So Paul proceeded a step further, to a link with divine truth and legal justice.”

Paul appealed to Deut. 25:1-4, but these verses do not say, “Pay the preacher.” In fact, there is no Old Testament reference that specifically says “pay preachers.” Paul used a *principle* from Deut. 25 to prove his point. If animals deserve compensation after they have worked, the same must be true for men. Paul argued from the lesser to the greater. The fact that he used a principle from the Old Testament shows that we may still use the Old Testament to determine right and wrong (1 Cor. 10:6). In fact, “*saith*” in verse 8

is a present tense verb. In verse 9, where Paul said, “*it is written in the law of Moses*”, he used a perfect tense verb (this was written in the past and there is still application from the Old Testament after Christianity was established). Paul knew the Old Testament has been completely replaced by the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:14), but he also recognized we do not discard the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament we have principles that teach us important things, even though we live under a New Testament. In fact, the Hebrew writer (12:1) said we need to look at the “cloud of witnesses” described in Heb. 11 to draw strength from them. We will not build an ark like Noah, offer up a child for a sacrifice like Abraham, or worship in the way Moses and Israel did. We must, however, “learn” from the Old Testament (Rom. 15:4 and see the commentary on this verse). Bible class teachers know full well the value of *learning from the Old Testament* because children are often told Old Testament stories and given points of application from them Sunday after Sunday. Through the 27 New Testament documents and the principles of the Old Testament we have “*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*” (2 Pet. 1:3).

Paul attributed the material in Deut. 25 to Moses (this is one indication Moses wrote the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament). Moses said oxen were not to be “muzzled” (*phimoo*) when they “*treadeth out the corn.*” *Treadeth (aloao)* was an agricultural term and it is found only here, verse 10, and 1 Tim. 5:18 (this one term is translated by four English words: “treadeth out the corn”). In Bible times harvested sheaves were trodden upon by oxen to loosen grain from the stalks. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 359) noted how “Gentiles had the practice of muzzling the oxen when they were driven around and around and perhaps drew rough sleds over grain that had been spread out in a circle in order to thresh it.” Jews were forbidden from this practice; an unmuzzled ox could eat and this was part of their “pay” for working. Paul used this same Old Testament quotation in his communication with Timothy to say “elders” could also be paid (1 Tim. 5:17-18). In the gospels *muzzled* is the word used to describe how Jesus dealt with the Sadducees (Mt. 22:34). It is also the word associated with Jesus silencing a demon (Mk. 1:25) and calming a storm (Mk. 4:39). Peter applied this word to “silencing” false teachers (1 Pet. 2:15).

The end of verse 9 and everything said in verse 10 is a bit complicated. Bullinger suggested Paul used an ellipsis so the word “*only*” should be added in 9b (i.e. “Is it *only* for the oxen that God careth?”). This seems to be the best sense of the text and Lenski (p. 359) translated the thought: “You certainly do not think that it is only for the oxen that God cares?” God certainly does value animals. He knows when they die and He commands man to extend humane treatment to them (compare Mt. 10:29; Ps. 104:21, 27-30). Though animals have value, they are less important than man. Jesus Himself said man is more valuable (Matt. 6:26). Man is more important because he is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). God did require animals to be treated in a humane way (Deut. 25:4), but mankind is higher in the creation order. Thus, if animals are paid, men must be paid. What was said in Moses’ Law about oxen (verse 9) was ultimately said “*for our sake*” (10a). God’s command about oxen certainly had application to these animals, but it was ultimately designed to prove that workers (and this includes people such as ministers) could be paid. Even James touched on the importance of paying wages to workers (Jas. 5:4).

“*Ox*” (*bous*) can refer to either an ox or a cow. “It could refer to an animal of either gender. Thus, either a bull or cow could be a *bous*. The plural form in the Old Testament is often translated ‘cattle’ or ‘herd.’ Only the best from the herd were selected as sacrifices (Leviticus 3:1)” (CBL, GED, 1:579).

The word translated “*ploweth*” in verse 10 (*arotriao*) was an agricultural term that described “the action performed by two oxen or two donkeys hitched to the plow and beam. The plow had no wheels and scratched the soil rather than turning it. The law forbade Jews to yoke to the plow two animals of different species (Deuteronomy 22:10)” (CBL, GED, 1:436). Animals were used to help produce wheat, rye, barley, etc. “*Corn*” as we know it (maize) was probably not familiar to these people.

Plowing describes the *beginning* of a project and *threshing* describes the *end* of a project. For those who engage in a farming enterprise, they share in the profits and produce of their work. A similar thing is true for evangelists. Rienecker and Rogers (p. 414) said “*ought*” (*opheilo*) to plow “generally shows a moral obligation.” Whether a minister is beginning a new work (plowing) or laboring with an existing congregation (threshing), the end of verse 10 says he has the “hope of partaking” (he is to be paid for his labor). “*Partaking*” (*metecho*) is a present tense verb (on-going action). This same term is used in verse

12 to describe paying other preachers. In chapter 10, this term is associated with “partaking” of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 10:17, 21). For the remaining places this word occurs in the New Testament, see 1 Cor. 10:30; Heb. 2:14; 5:13; 7:13 (in this final verse the ASV translates the word “*belongeth*”).

9:11: *If we sowed unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things?*

Most know that when services are rendered, payment is to be made. Paul had been in the city of Corinth and had assisted the Corinthians with learning and obeying the gospel. Since the Corinthians had received “*spiritual*” (*pneumatikos*) assistance from him and others (“*we*”), he and the others who helped had a right to receive “*carnal*” things (support, money, pay, lodging) from them. Paul spoke about this same matter in the Galatian letter (6:6).

Here Paul expressed his point in the form of a question. If these Christians had received information about the gospel, was “*it a great matter*” if they paid the person who taught them? *Great* (*meegas*) has the sense of unequal, unjust, burdensome. The implied answer to this question is “*no*.” Paul then took this implied answer a step further by contrasting the spiritual with the physical. If people pay for physical services (which have no eternal value), what about paying for things that have spiritual and eternal value? Stated another way, since Paul had sown “*spiritual seed*,” was it not right from him to have a “*material harvest*”?

Paul’s argument could not be refuted. In fact, it is so powerful it is found in other parts of the New Testament. Gentile Christians who lived in Macedonia and Achaia (Rom. 15:25-31) contributed money (*carnal things*) to poor Christians in Jerusalem. Gentiles did this because they were “*spiritually indebted*” to these saints. Paul received money from Christians at Philippi because he had taught them the gospel (Phil. 4:15-17). Even when writing to Philemon (verse 19) Paul said this man’s “*spiritual debt*” outweighed the value of his lost slave.

Allen (p. 109) rightly said, “There is not a case in the New Testament of individuals or churches sending money to other individuals or churches where the principle of spiritual indebtedness does not exist. Those opposed to the kind of cooperation employed to maintain such programs as World Radio and Herald of Truth contend that there is a pattern in the New Testament for church cooperation. If that view is correct, the concept of spiritual indebtedness is part of the pattern. That would mean one church could not send funds to another church to do anything unless the sending church was indebted spiritually to the receiving church. That view must be accepted or one must abandon his contention of ‘pattern’ cooperation.”

Understanding Paul’s argument allows us to easily define the key words in this verse. For instance, *carnal* (*sarkikos*) describes payment for spiritual instruction; it describes what is *earthly* instead of *spiritual* (it has nothing to do with sin). Spicq (3:240) defined *carnal* as “*material goods*.” *Spiritual* is also a key term and Paul used it 24 of the 26 times it occurs in the New Testament (Peter was the only other writer to use this word and he used it twice in a single verse—1 Pet. 2:5). Of the 24 times Paul used *carnal*, 15 of its occurrences are in this book (it is often joined with the subject of false teachers). For the other places where *spiritual* occurs in this letter see these verses: 2:13 (this verse used the word twice), 15; 3:1; 10:3, 4 (the word occurs twice); 12:1; 14:1, 37; 15:44, 46 (the word occurs twice in both of these verses).

A final key word is “*sow*” (*speiro*), a verb. This term occurs about fifty times in the New Testament and about half of these references are found in Mt. 13 and Mk. 4. Here *sow* “*refers to mission activity*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:263). All Christians are to be “*scattering seed*” (trying to plant the gospel in as many places as they can—compare 1 Cor. 3:6-7). While this is God’s plan for our life, many choose to *sow something else*. For instance, the younger son who left home (Lk. 15:11-32) is said to have “*wasted his substance*” (verse 13). *Wasted* (*diaskorpizo*) meant “*scatter, disperse, waste, winnow*.” He was scattering the “*substance*” (material blessings) described in Lk. 15:12. What have we *scattered* (sown) in the past? What are we *scattering* (sowing) now? What do we plan to *scatter* (sow) in the future? Paul gave an important principle in Gal. 6:7: What we sow is what we will one day reap.

9:12: *If others partake of (this) right over you, do not we yet more? Nevertheless we did not use this right; but we bear all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.*

A variety of arguments proving preachers are to be paid are set forth in the preceding verses. Here Paul continued to make this point by reminding the Corinthians of how they had paid and were continuing to pay other teachers. “Partake” (*metecho*) is a present tense verb (the KJV renders this “*be partakers*”). *Partake* is only found in this book (9:10; 10:17, 21, 30) and the book of Hebrews (Heb. 2:14; 5:13; 7:13—in this final passage it is translated “belongeth” or “pertaineth”). Here it is joined with the word “right” (*exousia*), a common New Testament word that is often translated “power.” If other teachers had the right (power) to continually share in the Corinthians’ physical blessings, did not Paul have this same right? Paul said he had been the “spiritual father” of this congregation; it was he who had begotten them through the gospel (he was the first teacher—1 Cor. 4:15). Thus, Paul was shocked to hear the Corinthians were paying others but concluded he and certain others (“*we*”) could not be paid.

Though Paul did not specify who was being paid, how much was being given, or which congregation(s) distributed the funds, some ministers had been and were continuing to be paid. We are also not told if the teachers who received compensation were teaching the truth or false doctrine. Perhaps Paul had left Corinth and false teachers came to this congregation after his departure. These men demanded to be paid and received support. Or, since Peter is mentioned in the immediate context (verse 5), he may have worked at Corinth and was paid (see 1:12; 3:22; 15:5). It is possible Peter and his family received funds from the Corinthians. It is possible that Apollos received remuneration for his work (1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6; 16:12), but verse 6 makes that unlikely. Of all the options it seems best to believe false teachers took money from the Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:17). Since other teachers had received funds from this congregation, Paul and other faithful preachers were also entitled support. In fact, Paul said, “*do not we yet more?*” If anyone had the right to be paid it was Paul because he started this congregation (verses 1-2).

By the time Paul penned this verse he had offered four arguments for paying preachers. In the preceding verses he appealed to nature, reason, custom, and the Scriptures to support this truth. At this point he could have stopped and said, “I have proven my case. Do what is right and support me.” He could have also said he deserved compensation because he “worked harder” than others (1 Cor. 15:10), but he did not make this argument. He had every right to receive funds from this congregation but he refused because of what he said in the previous chapter (there he spoke of a time when Christians surrendered their liberties). Paul had the right to a salary, but he did not want or take the Corinthian’s money. He forfeited his right to be paid because He “wanted people to know that he was interested in them and in their spiritual welfare only, and not in their purses” (Gromacki, p. 111).

Instead of taking anything from the Corinthians, Paul “*bare all things*” so the gospel would not be hindered. The word translated *bare* (*stego*) is used only one other time in this book (13:7). In this latter reference it describes a quality of agape love. Here it is a present tense verb and it means ““*enduring anything*”” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:272). Poverty, hunger, thirst, a lack of clothing, a definite place to call home, and perhaps sufficient medical attention—men like Paul had given up much to help the members of this congregation. “The minister of the Gospel needs this forbearance” (Bengel, 2:212).

The word “*hindrance*” (*enkope*) is a noun and it occurs only here in the New Testament. The background of this term is that of a retreating army. As a military unit retreated, it “would cut up (break up) the road behind it in order to temporarily delay or hinder the pursuing enemy” (CBL, GED, 2:211). Here the word means Paul did not want to delay or interfere with the spreading of the gospel. After all, hindering the truth brings terrible consequences (Rom. 1:18). Even causing “a little one to stumble” (destroying the faith of a new or weak Christian) will bring about severe punishment from God (Mk. 9:42). If we are guilty of hindering the truth through neglect, laziness, stubbornness, or something else, or we engage in actions that destroy the faith of a fellow Christian, we are guilty of a terrible sin and will be held accountable. For additional information on the word “*gospel*” (*euangelio*), see the commentary on 1 Cor. 15:1-2.

9:13: *Know ye not that they that minister about sacred things eat of the things of the temple, and they that wait upon the altar have their portion with the altar?*

Here is the fifth illustration Paul used to affirm that preachers are to be paid. “Some subjects are of such a nature that they must be carried through to the end. To stop halfway is to leave a wrong impression. Every natural consideration gives Paul the right to take support, and so does every legal consideration which is supported by God himself. But finally also his right is upheld by every sacred consideration, both that embodied in the old Levitical arrangements and that embodied in the Lord’s own regulations for the preachers of his gospel” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 366). Preachers have a very important role in the church (Rom. 10:14-15) and Christians should be glad they can help support any man who preaches and defends the truth.

Under the Law of Moses Jewish priests were compensated for their services (this was part of God’s expressed will, Num. 18:8-32). Pagan priests in first century times (and Corinth had pagan priests) were also paid for their services. If the Corinthians wanted to argue about paying Paul or any other faithful preacher of the gospel, they could have said his previous illustrations (an evangelist, soldier, plowman, thresher, and vineyard worker) were all irrelevant because they did not specifically involve “church workers.” Paul prevented any such objection by here referring to religious workers. There were people who served at the “*altar*” (officiated as priests); the Corinthians knew this, and thus Paul provided proof for his point that was irrefutable. Whether these Christians had come out of paganism or Judaism, they knew religious workers were paid because they did work. Priests helped take care of the temple, prepare and offer sacrifices, and often did some “clean-up” work. In the ASV and KJV the word “*minister*” (*ergazomai*) is translated “work” or “labor” in many other places (Mt. 7:23; 21:28; Lk. 13:14; Jn. 6:27; 9:4, etc.). In the Thessalonian correspondence (2 Thess. 3:10) Paul used this word to say, “If any will not work, neither let him eat.” Here the term is a present tense verb. Paul also used this word in verse 6 of this chapter where it is also in the present tense.

“*Sacred*” (*hieros*) is translated “*holy*” in the KJV. Aside from here the word occurs only in 2 Tim. 3:15 where it is translated “*sacred writings*.” Commentators disagree over whether or not Paul’s thought included pagan temples. If his thought does include them, he recognized the value in appealing to them for an illustration, but he did not approve of their work (compare Lk. 16:1-8). Today teachers and preachers may also illustrate truth by sometimes appealing to things that are wrong (Paul appealed to idols to teach the truth about God, Acts 17:22-23). Today we might appeal to the false religious writings of others to demonstrate how the gospel is true and other religious claims are false.

Another important word is “*temple*” (*hieron*). The first five books of the New Testament (Matthew-Acts) use this word quite often, but this term is found only once in the remaining books of the New Testament (i.e. here). This fact indicates that Christians did not have a Jewish mindset concerning the temple. Christians realized God “does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24). Under the New Testament system, a church building is not a “holy place.” The church (i.e. the people) is holy, but where it meets is just a building or meeting place.

In the middle of this verse is the word “*wait*,” a term meaning “to sit steadily beside.” This means religious workers were always “on-call” and they performed the work of a priest. Because these men did not have a typical job with regular or set hours, this was one more reason to compensate them (they needed to be supported to carry out their work and be accessible at various times). At the end of this verse is a verb translated “*have their portion*” (“*are partakers*,” KJV), a term not found anywhere else in the New Testament. Since this term (*summerizo*) is in the middle voice, it means ministers have a right to share in the offerings given to God. They were to “*eat of the things of the temple*” (ASV) or “*live of the things of the temple*” (KJV). Paul “drew the parallel from the Old Testament practice that allowed the priests to eat portions of the animals and other foodstuffs offered to God on the altar in the tabernacle” (CBL, GED, 6:159).

9:14: *Even so did the Lord ordain that they that proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel.*

In the previous verses Paul provided five arguments to prove that preachers are to be paid. His final argument is in this verse: Jesus “*ordained*” (*diatasso*) that preachers should “*live of the gospel*” (be paid). Kittel (8:35) suggested *ordained* refers “to one of the special orders of Jesus in His address on sending out the disciples, Mt. 10:10; Lk. 10:7.” For other places that contain the word translated *ordain*, see Lk. 3:13 (*appointed*); Acts 18:2 (*commanded*); 20:13 (*appointed*); 1 Cor. 7:17; 11:34 (*set in order*). Here Gingrich and Danker (p. 189) defined it as “*order, direct, command.*” We may not know precisely when Jesus gave this instruction, but we do know He gave it.

Many religious groups *ordain* various people, but this is not what Paul had in mind in this verse. In fact, no place in the New Testament describes the type of “ordinations” performed in the religious world. An “ordained” person in the various denominations is someone who has received religious authority from a local congregation or some other institution. When the Old Testament was in place there were elaborate ceremonies to “ordain” priests (Ex. 28-29). Under the New Testament system (the covenant all the world is to follow until the end of time), there is no “ordaining” (this practice is a tradition and precept of men, not God—Mt. 15:8-9). True Christians do not get their authority from any earthly organization; they get their authority from the word of God (2 Tim. 4:2). Since all Christians are “priests” (1 Pet. 2:5), the concept of “ordaining people” is foreign to the New Testament.

Ordain is used in other places such as Heb. 5:1 (see the commentary on this verse for more reasons why the denominational practice of “ordaining” people like preachers is wrong). In 1 Cor. 9:14 *ordained* tells us Paul was familiar with what Jesus taught during His earthly ministry (perhaps he received this information during the time recorded in Gal. 1:16-17). We also learn that the Corinthians had some knowledge of information not recorded in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Towards the end of this verse both the ASV and KJV translate the thought “*live of the gospel.*” The NKJV, NIV and NASB say “from” the gospel. The preposition in the Greek text is “*ek*” and it literally means “out of.” Just as priests lived “out of” the temple, so preachers are to “live out of” the gospel. Since *live* is a present tense verb, congregations have authority and an obligation to pay those who work with them (ministers should receive a regularly salary that is livable income). “Paul’s conclusion could not have been put in stronger terms” (Holman, 7:148). Barnes (First Corinthians, p. 161) wisely said: “They should be made comfortable; not rich. They should receive so much as to keep their minds from being harassed with cares, and their families from want; not so much as to lead them to forget their dependence on God, or on the people. Probably the true rule is, that they should be able to live as the mass of the people among whom they labor live; that they should be able to receive and entertain the poor, and be willing to do it; and so that the rich also may not despise them, or turn away from their dwelling.”

Holman (7:154) wisely said, “Ministers may be prone to ignore legitimate reasons that they should refuse pay. Legitimate reasons might include ministry in areas where people have been hardened to the gospel because of the monetary abuses of other Christian ministers or television evangelists. Congregations, in turn, particularly those with small budgets, might be tempted to use Paul’s example to suggest that their own ministers be self-supporting—not because paying their ministers hinders the gospel, but because their members do not contribute enough to the church.”

Preachers and local congregations need to use common sense in this area, but many do not. Sometimes fault lies with one or the other because churches use too many tactics from the world to tend to spiritual things. Elders are sometimes selected because they are “good with business,” not because they have the qualities described in 1 Tim.3 :1-7 and Tit. 1:5-9. Preachers may be paid “according to their experience,” instead of the standard given in this verse.

Paul’s six arguments about the correctness of paying preachers form the foundation necessary for the rest of this chapter. He had to prove he could be paid before discussing why he had forfeited this right. For a special study on the word “*gospel*” (*euangelio*), see the commentary on 1 Cor. 15:1-2.

9:15: *But I have used none of these things: and I write not these things that it may be so done in my case; for it were good for me rather to die, than that any man should make my glorifying void.*

The preceding information in this chapter conclusively shows that preachers deserve to be paid. Here Paul continued to deal with this subject but made a subtle change. In the previous verses he spoke in the plural (“we” and “our,” verses 4, 5, 10, 11, 12). Starting with this verse he switched to the singular (“I”). He told the Corinthians, “*I have used none of these things.*” Readers may be interested in knowing that *used* (*chraomai*) is the same verb found in 7:31 (see the previous commentary on 7:29-31 for a discussion of this word).

When Paul said, *I have used none of these things*, he used the perfect tense. This tense means Paul was not in the habit of taking money from local congregations (he forfeited his right to a “church check” at Corinth as well as other places and this was still his practice when this letter was written). Paul had given up this right along with other rights (8:13) to “give no occasion of stumbling in anything” (2 Cor. 6:3).

Though Paul was clearly entitled to support, he wanted the Corinthians to know he was not asking for money (this is stated in the middle of verse 15). He may have said this to prevent someone from saying this letter was designed to extract money from the Corinthians. Paul immediately dealt with this potential charge by saying he *still* didn’t want any money from the Corinthians. Throughout history there have been many cases of “religious” people using God for gain. One of the best examples of using religion for personal gain is found in the Old Testament (Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli). Eli was a descendent of Aaron through Ithamar, the youngest of Aaron’s sons (Lev. 10:1-2, 12). Eli’s sons were priests, but they did not “know the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:12). According to the Old Testament law they had a right to part of the meat brought for sacrifice, but these men took meat to which they were not entitled (1 Sam. 2:13-17). These sons also became sexually involved with some of the Hebrew women (1 Sam. 2:22). It seems they seduced young women who worked at the entrance of the tabernacle. Thus, sex and money scams involving religion are by no means new. Paul wanted nothing to do with these types of things so his ministry would not be damaged. All Christians today should follow His example (compare 1 Cor. 6:18a).

Other words in this verse are packed with emotion (“*my case*” and “*die*”). Paul also spoke of “*glorifying.*” He meant he “would rather die than give up the course he had chosen.” Paul was not involved in some type of egocentric whim—he wanted the Corinthians to understand exactly how he felt. Paul literally felt like death was preferable to receiving money from these Christians. “*Void*” (*kenoo*) also affirms that Paul did not want things to change. He believed his ability to *glory* (be able to claim he refused to accept support from the Corinthians) was more important than life itself. Willis (p. 241) noted how “*Glorying* (*kauchema*) refers not to the act of boasting, but to the grounds of boasting, i.e., his refusal of church support.” This term is found two other times in this letter (5:6 and 9:16). Brown (1:229) rightly said: “Naturally Paul knows exactly where the limit comes (cf. 2 Cor. 11:16ff.)”

9:16: *For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; for woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel.*

This passage as well as verse 17 tells us why Paul chose to “*preach*” (*euangelizo*), a present tense verb that is also used in places like 1 Cor. 1:17 and 15:1-2. Paul did not become a proclaimer of the good news so he could brag (“*glory*”). Paul became a preacher out of “*necessity.*” Jesus handpicked him for the work of an apostle and Paul felt obligated to accept this mission (Acts 9:15; 26:16-18). If a man “boasts of his own behavior (2 Cor. 1:12; cf. Gal. 6:4; Jas. 3:14), he should do so only in so far as his life is lived in dependence on God and in responsibility to him. For in the last analysis the Christian can never boast about himself (1 Cor. 9:16), but only of His Lord” (Brown, 1:229). Paul’s *preaching* is especially interesting in light of Gal. 1:23 (he proclaimed a message he had previously tried to destroy).

Paul had free will and could have refused the Lord’s invitation to become a Christian and the commission to preach (Acts 26:19), but he chose to be obedient. He was someone who had a strong sense of responsibility and duty (Rom. 1:14-15). Unlike those who decide to “become a preacher and see how it

goes” or carelessly decide to preach, Paul made a careful and conscious choice. This verse does not support the false doctrine of Calvinism (this belief is discussed in the commentary on 2:14). Here the emphasis is on Paul’s role as an apostle, not that God “selected him for salvation.”

The verb translated “*is laid upon me*” (*epikeimai*) is in the present tense (i.e. Paul felt the burden to preach the gospel every single day). Since this word is translated “pressed” in Lk. 5:1, it also seems Paul felt some “pressure” to preach. “Preaching was Paul’s whole life, and ‘he could no more stop doing it than he could stop breathing’” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:400). Another key word is “*necessity*” (*ananke*). This noun is also found in chapter 7 (verses 26 and 37). Here we may define *necessity* as “compulsion” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:77). It is “testimony to the certainty of the unconditional commission from God which is now the sole content of his thought and action” (ibid, p. 79).

Because God had handpicked Paul, this apostle knew he had a significant responsibility. He said “*woe*” would come upon him if he did not preach. Paul believed calamity would be his lot in life if he did not fulfill his mission, and receiving pay was immaterial to fulfilling his job to preach (compare Rom. 1:14). Many commentators understand the *woe* (*ouai*) in verse 16 as the loss of eternal salvation (i.e. eternal condemnation in Hell) and this explanation is consistent with the rest of the New Testament. *Woe* (*ouai*) is used over forty times in the New Testament and it contains the ideas of judgment, sorrow, and warning. Here Thayer (p. 461) says it means “divine penalty threatens me.” “A man whose heart is not in the ministry, and who would be *as* happy in any other calling, is not fit to be an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Unless his *heart* is there, and he *prefers* that to any other calling, he should never think of preaching the gospel” (Barnes, First Corinthians, p. 164).

9:17: *For if I do this of mine own will, I have a reward: but if not of mine own will, I have a stewardship intrusted to me.*

In the previous verse Paul said he preached out of “*necessity*.” He was not like someone who on a whim thought, “I might like to preach.” Paul made a deliberate choice about preaching the gospel and he was under a divine obligation to engage in this work. Here he made another point: If he had become a preacher of his own “*will*” (he had volunteered or chosen to do this of his own initiative), he would have been entitled to a “*reward*.” If preaching the gospel had “*not*” been of his “*own will*” (and this was true for him—God personally called him and he responded), Paul had a “*stewardship*” (*oikonomia*). Rather than use the word *stewardship* the KJV says, “*dispensation of the gospel*.” The ASV rendering is the better expression of the thought (i.e. Paul had been entrusted with the gospel and he sought to be a faithful steward of it, 1 Cor. 4:1-2).

In Paul’s writing *stewardship* “denotes the apostle’s attitude toward the duties of his apostolic office. In 1 Corinthians 9:17 Paul used the word to describe the responsibility of preaching the gospel entrusted him by God as a ‘commission’ from which he could not draw back” (CBL, GED, 4:322). *Stewardship* “stresses obligation, responsibility, and faithfulness of the servant to his master in carrying out the entrusted task” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 415). In other places such as Lk. 16:2-4 this same term is used to describe the management of property.

God had made Paul a steward of the gospel and verse 17 expresses a simple point. In most cases, if a person is doing what he is commanded to do, he has no reason to “boast” about his actions (compare Lk. 17:10). On the other hand, if a person is entitled to something, but freely gives up their entitlement (such as not accepting pay for preaching), there is a sense in which he can “boast” (verse 16). Today, if a person uses a “day off” to come and help their employer, he freely gives up some of his time off (something he is entitled to) and can thus “boast” or “glory.” In this type of case there is “neither vanity nor arrogance, nor on the other hand mere contentment or satisfaction, but rather honor, a feeling of dignity and nobility” (Spicq, 2:302).

“*Reward*” (*misthos*) occurs earlier in this book (3:8, 14). It is also found in the next verse. Jesus used this term in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:12, 46; 6:1). Though Paul did not specify what the reward is for Christians who volunteer to be preachers, he made it clear he was not entitled to it (some additional

information about Christianity and rewards may be found in the commentary on Mt. 18:7, section 23 of the Gospels commentary). Paul was ineligible for this reward because of how his preaching career began. He became an evangelist *out of necessity* (verse 17).

The word translated “will” (*hekon*) occurs only twice in the New Testament (here and Rom. 8:20) and it described a voluntary act. Many have done something of their own initiative and accord, but this was not how Paul became a preacher. Paul was not forced to become a Christian and preach the gospel; Acts 26:19 shows he had an opportunity to disobey. He meant he became a preacher because of divine motivation. He was called upon to preach (Acts 26:16) and he accepted this call after becoming a Christian (Acts 22:10, 16). God sought him instead of him seeking God and the Christian faith.

The word “stewardship” gives us some insight to Paul as well as the first century world. In this day and time most stewards were slaves. Slaves were often well educated people who had charge of and control over valuable property or possessions. A “master did not ask: ‘Will you take this stewardship?’ He only gave the order: ‘Take it!’ The slave took it—woe to him if he was obstinate and refused” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 371).

As shown in the previous paragraph, Paul had free-will (he could have rejected Christianity and continued his persecution, he could have rejected Christianity and stopped his persecution, or he could have become a Christian and not become a preacher). He chose to use his free-will to embrace the truth and was thus *entrusted* (*pisteuo*—a verb normally translated “believe”) with the gospel (the KJV uses the word *committed*). Paul described this trust with the passive voice and the perfect tense. This means God bestowed a stewardship on him (this is the force of the *passive* voice). By using the perfect tense he said this bestowal was permanent. Slaves knew their owners had no obligation to provide their servants with a reward. However, as Jesus explained in two of His parables (the talents and the pounds), God does reward His faithful servants (see Mt. 25:41-30; Lk. 19:12-27. Each of these parables also shows what happens if God’s servants are unfaithful). Because God will “recompense” people at the end of time (Heb. 10:30), Paul said he was under necessity to preach the gospel (verse 16). “Stewards have to do what their masters want them to do even when they are tired and when they do not like the task assigned to them (cf. 4:1-2)” (Gromacki, p. 112).

9:18: *What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel without charge, so as not to use to the full my right in the gospel.*

In verse 17 Paul argued that those who volunteer to become ministers will receive a “reward” that is distinctive to them (compare Mt. 10:41). Since he became a preacher under very different and unusual circumstances, here he asked if he had any hope of a future reward. Here he affirmed he had both rewards in this life as well as the prospect of a future reward (for the future reward compare 2 Tim. 4:8). Paul had many rewards, but he was not entitled to the specific reward discussed in verse 17.

One of Paul’s earthly rewards is in this verse: He received great pleasure from preaching the gospel “without charge.” *Without charge* (*adapanos*) is found only here in the New Testament and it may be defined as “free, without expense.” The “a” at the beginning of the original word gives this term a negative meaning, just as our English word *theist* becomes *atheist* by the addition of an “a.” The rest of the original word (*dapan*) meant “cost” or “expense.” By putting an “a” in front of this word, the meaning is changed to “no cost” or “no expense.” Paul’s choice to preach without pay stands “in contrast to others who were using the gospel to make a profit” (CBL, GED, 1:69).

Paul had the right to accept pay (see the preceding verses), but he repeatedly refused to accept it for his efforts. He refused compensation so he did not “abuse” his “power in the gospel” (KJV) (i.e. his authority). The ASV renders the thought “use to the full my right.” These different renderings are based upon a single term (*katachraomai*) that is only found here and 7:31. Here this word means “so that I make no use of my right” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:270). Living in this manner was unusual because even first century slaves were provided with basic provisions such as food and clothing. Paul refused to accept material things from those he taught; he was someone who freely gave and accepted nothing in return (compare 2 Cor. 12:15). For a special study on the word “gospel”

(*euangelio*), see the commentary on 1 Cor. 15:1-2.

Allen (p. 110) offered some very excellent thoughts about Paul, preachers, and pay. He said, “Paul’s reward came in *choosing* to forego his right of financial support through preaching the message without charge (9:18). He felt he had no choice concerning his call to the apostleship but he could choose to preach without pay. Apparently, he was rewarded in at least three ways. First, he knew he had sacrificed his needs in the interest of others. Second, he realized he had not fully used his God-given privileges. Third, he had confidence that his motives for preaching were free from any financial consideration.” Allen also noted (p. 110) how some, “in emulation of Paul, think they should engage in secular pursuits to make a living and preach without pay where the church is weak or non-existent. This is a noble aspiration that few have fulfilled. In most cases, such people become involved in full-time ‘tent-making’ and preach a little ‘on the side.’ Paul spent most of his time in sharing the good news of redemption and very little time in working with his hands. Not many men with families to support can maintain that kind of balance.”

A final observation from Allen (p. 110) is also excellent: “Some churches have been hurt by hearing preachers whom they did not pay. Members grew accustomed to receiving something for nothing and failed to practice biblical liberality. Later, even Paul ironically apologized to the Corinthians for having wronged them in this matter (II Cor. 12:13). Most preachers need to be married but Paul was an exception. Most preachers must also be supported financially although Paul was an exception.”

In many ways Paul was different from most modern preachers. This author has seen more than a few preachers “insist on their rights.” When visiting a hospital, they want “their visitation rights.” When it comes to a parking space, they want “their space.” When they are addressed or introduced, they want “their title” to be used. All these practices are contrary to the type of servant attitude found in the New Testament (Mt. 20:25-28). If a man is given “special privileges,” it is always wise and right to remember what is said in this chapter (in some cases it is best to not use some privileges).

9:19: *For though I was free from all (men), I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more.*

In first century times some people were free and some were slaves. Paul was one of the free, plus he was a Roman citizen. “Free” (*eleutheros*) is the same term used in 7:21, 22, 39. It is also found in the first verse of this chapter as well as 12:13. Here it is expressed with the present tense and Brown (1:720) said it means the “man who is truly free shows his freedom in being free for the service of God. . . .and his fellow man” Because Paul was free, a Roman citizen, and a Christian, he had several rights and was capable of serving God in many different ways. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 375) said: “‘Free from all men’ – what a weight these few words carry! Paul had broken with his entire past, with his own nation, and was not understood by many of his fellow believers. He had learned to endure envy and hate, to face danger and persecution, to look death in the face again and again – alone, depending only on his Lord. He had unlearned completely to bow to the opinions and the will of men. He is free, he enjoys the whole of Christian freedom, he is wholly sure of himself, he is dependent on no man, he is proud with a sacred pride, unyielding to the demands of any man.”

Instead of using all his rights, Paul chose to bring himself under “bondage” (*douloo*) “to all.” Paul used this same term (which is translated “servant” in the KJV) in Rom. 6:18, 22 to describe “servants of righteousness” and *servants* of God. One of the other interesting places where the *bondage* (*servant*) term occurs is Tit. 2:3 (“not enslaved” to wine). Paul put himself *under bondage to all* (forfeited some of his rights) so he could “*gain the more.*” The point is not too much different from what he said to the Galatians (Gal 5:13): “*For ye, brethren, were called for freedom; only (use) not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another.*” Paul used His freedom to serve others (both Christians and non-Christians), even though this sometimes meant surrendering some of his personal rights. Paul did this in hopes of winning *more* converts (he did not expect to convert everyone he met—just as we should not—but he wanted to help save as many as possible).

One of Paul’s evangelistic techniques is found in 22b (he became *all things to all men*). Paul’s word

for *gain* at the end of verse 19 (*kerdaino*) is used elsewhere in this chapter. It occurs twice in verse 20; it is also found in verses 21 and 22. Outside this book *gain* occurs in places like Phil. 3:8. Here it means when “souls are won into the kingdom of God through the preaching of the gospel or through righteous living, it is gain” (CBL, GED, 3:331). Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 375) said *gain* “is a technical missionary term” that “alternates” with the word “*save*” in verse 22.

Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 374) said Paul’s thought “is highly paradoxical: on the one hand, to be free from all men; then, to be bound to all men. Luther had caught Paul’s secret when he wrote regarding the liberty of a Christian man: ‘A Christian man is a free lord over all things and subject to nobody. A Christian man is a ministering servant in all things and subject to everybody.’ Yet Paul’s paradox must be properly understood: when he made himself a slave to all men he did this of his own accord, he did it freely; it was the voluntary act of a free man...Paul does *not* say: ‘I let all men (or any man) make a slave of me.’ To be made a slave thus is the very subversion of Christianity, 7:23: ‘Become not slaves of men.’”

Some observations by Allen (p. 112) are also helpful: “Ordinarily, men are not critical of those who work without pay. In that situation the laborer is obviously not seeking his own welfare.” Though Paul worked for free, his paying his own way was used against him. It was “alleged that the contribution commanded for the poor saints in Jerusalem (16:1-2) actually went into his own pockets. He was accused of being crafty in not taking pay for his preaching and making a profit by means of guile (II Cor. 12:14-18)” (ibid). “If a man does or does not take money for preaching, he will be criticized by some. It is simply impossible to please everyone. Jesus beautifully depicted this truth when he described the reactions of the people to the different approaches employed by himself and John the Baptist (Matt. 11:16-18)” (Allen, p. 112).

9:20: *And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;*

This verse explains how Paul tried to convert people (this information continues the thought from the word “gain” in verse 19). When evangelizing among the Jewish people, Paul respected and followed Jewish practices and customs. He would have attended services in the synagogues, not eaten food forbidden by the Old Testament law, etc. Paul became “*as a Jew*” (he acted similar to them in their social and religious beliefs to maximize his personal influence). This did not mean he compromised the truth of the gospel; he did not seek to worship and serve God through the Old Testament law. He was sincerely friendly and respectful while among the Jewish people to help them realize their way of worship was no longer acceptable to God (Rom. 10:4). He gave Jews “the same kind of help he would have wished to receive had he been one of them” (The Church’s Bible, p. 156).

An illustration of how Paul respected Jewish beliefs and practices but did not compromise the gospel is found in the act of circumcision. Paul required Timothy to be circumcised in deference to some Jews (Acts 16:1-3). When he was involved with Titus (a Gentile, Gal. 2:3), Paul refused to have him circumcised because this act could have been understood to mean that Gentiles had to comply with part of the Old Testament law. Paul accommodated the Jews as fully as possible, but he refused to violate any part of the gospel to bring the unsaved to Christ (there are limits in what can be done to evangelize the world). Christians cannot engage in things that are wrong or give a false impression about some part of the gospel. All should recognize that some things are completely contrary to New Testament evangelism. It is wrong to bully people into conversion, brainwash people, and manipulate them in other ways. God’s power to save is the gospel (Rom. 1:16). As noted in the commentary on 1:20-21, people have often tried to save people using things God did not authorize (drama and entertainment over preaching). Religious teachers often rely on gimmicks to draw and keep people whereas God tells us to rely on the gospel (Rom. 1:16). Many of the things used as an “entry point” for teaching the unsaved the gospel turn out to be the “exit point” for Christians who leave the church. In the present verse Paul plainly tells us there are limits on evangelism—we cannot do anything contrary to the gospel to reach the unsaved. *Truth and love* are two of the essential guidelines we must use when teaching people (Eph. 4:15).

Preaching in Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath was one of Paul’s evangelistic tools (Acts 13:33-34;

17:2—“as his custom was”). By attending Jewish assemblies Paul had a chance to study with the Hebrew people from their Scriptures and use many verses (including prophecies) to prove that Jesus is the Son of God (for information on Old Testament prophecies about Jesus, see the information at the end of the commentary on Heb. 4:12). When working among the Gentiles (verse 22), Paul used different strategies. He was not bound to use the same techniques among different people; he was, however, always bound to teach the truth and act in a way consistent with the gospel just as we are. We must teach the truth and use the best Biblical strategy to reach the people in our area.

Paul was a true leader in having a “multicultural ministry.” Because he worked with such a wide range of people, he had to often make personal and cultural judgments involving simple things like clothing, holidays, eating habits, religious beliefs, family practices, etc. Some think Paul’s vow at Cenchrea (Acts 18:18) can be explained by his *becoming as a Jew*. That is, Paul engaged in this Jewish custom since he was with Jewish people. Many also believe his *becoming as a Jew* explains Acts 21:26 (he financially supported a vow). Both of these explanations may be correct.

The middle of verse 20 refers to those “*under the law*.” The exact meaning of this expression is uncertain. Some think it refers to proselytes. Support for this view is found in interpreting 20a as a reference to full-fledged Jews and this part of the verse as proselytes. While this is a possibility, Willis (p. 246) is probably right. He said the word “*Jews*” described *nationality*. Thus, the expression “*under the law*” described the Jews’ *religious* choice. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 376) agrees: “‘*Jews*’ refers to nationality, and ‘*under law*’ refers to religion.” Jews were “*under the law*” given by Moses and Jehovah God and everyone else was a Gentile.

Although this verse tells us there were Jews still trying to keep the Law of Moses (a system God had replaced with the gospel—2 Cor. 3:14), here we see that Paul did not mock those who were religiously wrong. Rather than make fun of those who were trying to use a religious system God no longer accepts, Paul tried to teach people the truth by “*living as a Jew*.” He was respectful, thoughtful, and considerate of others who were in religious error. Today we, too, will find people who are in religious error and we must teach them the truth by acting as Paul did (this is applying the golden rule, Mt. 7:12). Like Paul, our goal must be to “*gain the more*” (19b).

Towards the end of verse 20 a final point is made. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know he was not “*under the law*” (due to a manuscript variation this information is in the ASV, NASB, RSV and NIV but not the KJV and NKJV). Paul meant he had no interest in observing the Old Testament laws for justification (whatever he did concerning the Old Testament law was for “*social living*” and “*personal influence*” to convert Jews to Christianity). Paul knew that Christians live under a New Testament (compare Gal. 6:2 and Jas. 1:25). Because he was a Christian and knew that the Old Testament system had been replaced by the New Testament, he broke all ties with Moses’ Law as far as seeking justification through the old covenant (compare Gal. 5:4). He was, however, willing to observe (abide by) some of the Old Testament laws if they didn’t conflict with the New Testament to evangelize the world. He never altered his message or morals; he was flexible and inflexible at the same time and this pattern is one we must follow as we use every legitimate means to carry out the great commission (Mt. 28:19-20).

9:21: *to them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law*

Verses 20-22 provide several illustrations of how Paul “*became all things to all men*” so he could excel at evangelism (22b). Here the expression “*without law*” refers to Gentiles (those not under the Law of Moses). “The adjective *anomos*, lit., ‘lawless,’ does not here mean transgressing law, but simply those that were outside law, as in Romans 2:14. The rendering ‘outlaw’ is not satisfactory” (Vine, 2:17).

When Paul worked among the Gentiles, he was *without law*. That is, he did not live by the laws found in the Old Testament or use the Old Testament because the Old Testament law had been given to the Jews, not Gentiles (Rom. 3:1-2). *Without law* does not mean Paul lived “*in a lawless and in a godless fashion when he was among Gentiles*. He did not act like a pagan or become a pagan, he was not utterly devoid of divine law. He was and he remained a Christian even among the Gentiles even as he was and

remained a Christian among the Jews” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 377). Paul “made himself like them out of mercy and compassion, not from craftiness and deceit” (The Church’s Bible, p. 156). For information on how the Gentiles were *without law*, see the commentary on Rom. 2:12, 14-15.

When living among the Jews (verse 20), Paul did abide by Old Testament customs because this was a practical method of evangelism. Gentiles, however, had no interest in the Old Testament practices of Judaism (i.e. observing special dietary laws, practicing circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, etc.). Had Paul tried to follow some of the Jewish practices while working with Gentiles, his work would have been greatly hindered. If he acted like the Gentiles when in the midst of Jewish people, his evangelistic efforts would have also been jeopardized. Paul’s use of different approaches to evangelism for Jews and Gentiles is actually illustrated in Acts 17:1-3; 22-24. He literally tried to become “one” with those in his midst.

At the end of this verse Paul spoke of gaining those who were “*without law*” (i.e. the Old Testament law given through Moses). Warren Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 601) noted that when Paul “preached to the Jews, he started with the Old Testament patriarchs; but when he preached to the Gentiles, he began with the God of creation. Paul did not have a ‘stock sermon’ for all occasions.” Jesus used a similar technique when dealing with people. “To the highborn Jew, Nicodemus, He talked about spiritual birth (John 3); but to the Samaritan woman, He spoke about living water (John 4)” (ibid). Flexibility and adaptability were needed in Paul’s day and these qualities will surely be necessary until the end of time. Christians must be willing to stretch, bend, and accommodate themselves to the lost in every possible way, unless something would compromise the gospel or cause them to endorse or support something God does not. Our job is to reach as many unsaved souls as possible.

A final point in verse 21 is Paul “*not being without law to God.*” Paul was not under the Old Testament law (just as all people today are not because it has been replaced), but this does not mean he was free from all law. Here he specifically says he was “under law to Christ” (i.e. the New Testament). The New Testament or new covenant is a system of grace and truth (Jn. 1:17), but it is also a system containing law. *Under law* means “legal, subject to law, obedient to the law, ‘under legal obligation to Christ’” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 416). *Under law to Christ* is also referred to as the *doctrine of God and Christ* (2 Jn. 9; Tit. 2:10), the *gospel of God* (Rom. 1:1), the *power of God unto salvation* (Rom. 1:16), and the *gospel of the kingdom* (Mt. 4:23). It is called the *perfect law of liberty* (Jas. 1:25), the *truth* (Jn. 17:17), the *word of God* (Acts 4:31), the *word of life* (Phil. 2:16), the *traditions* given to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:15), the *pattern of sound words* (2 Tim. 1:13), and the *word of grace* (Acts 20:32). It is called the *law of Christ* in Gal. 6:2 and the *royal law* in Jas. 2:8. When people do not properly understand God’s *law of liberty*, they are subject to and often fall prey to one of two extremes. Some embrace legalism (mainly law and little grace), while others embrace liberalism (virtually all grace and no law). Just as God told Joshua (Josh. 1:7) to avoid going to the “right or left” (he was to avoid extremes), so we need to have a Biblical and balanced view of God’s law. God’s law perfectly combines grace and law. It is a system with obligations and all accountable people are to be obedient to this way (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) so they can stand in God’s grace (Rom. 5:2).

9:22: *To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak: I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.*

In addition to reaching out to Jews and Gentiles (verses 20-21), Paul knew there were “*weak*” people who needed help. *Weak* (*asthenes*) is the same term used in 1 Cor. 8:7, 9, 10. It describes Christians who are bothered by certain practices (Jesus spoke of these people as well in Mt. 18:5-10. For more information on the “little ones” He spoke of, see section 23 in the Gospels commentary). The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:401-402) defined *weak* as “Christians who were recently converted, extra sensitive, lacking strong convictions, or deficient in understanding.” One example of how Christians can be *weak* is described in the preceding chapter (some were able to eat idol meat with a good conscience and the *weak* could not). What is “not an issue” for some brethren is troubling for others. Of course, being “weak” as the Bible uses this terminology applies only to matter of conscience—morals and doctrine are not included in this word. Today many Christians are “weak” in the area of special holidays. Some Christians

are not comfortable with celebrating days like Halloween because it has pagan origins. Others object to celebrating Christmas since it seems virtually impossible for December 25th to be the time of Jesus' birth (see this point discussed in the commentary on Lk. 2 located in section 4 of the Gospels commentary).

When Paul found Christians who objected to eating idol meat (i.e. "weak" Christians), he also refused to eat this meat. He was entitled to eat this food and had no qualms about doing so under other circumstances, but for the sake of the weaker Christian he forfeited this right. Paul literally did his best to become "*all things to all men*" so he could save and aid the greatest number of people. He was a Christian who used every legitimate means to advance the gospel of Christ. He did not sacrifice principle or truth; he approached people on "their most accessible side" (Vine, 2:65). He "followed Jesus who could dine with Pharisees and publicans and come into contact with harlots without receiving a stain or leaving a false impression" (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 381).

Verse 22 leaves no doubt about the importance of evangelism. In the middle of this verse "*become*" is a perfect tense verb (Paul had *become* this way in the past and he continued to act in this manner). By becoming *all things to all men* he tried to leave no stone unturned. He did everything in his power to teach people the gospel of Christ. No cost was too high to teach people about Jesus (compare Rom. 9:3; 10:1). "The perfect tense expresses the abiding results of his action in the past. The comprehensiveness of his statement is only limited by his relationship to Christ" (Vine, 2:65).

Paul was realistic enough to know he could not save everyone; he could save *some* and this must be our attitude as well. We also see in the verse the importance of man's eternal spirit—if saving just "some" justified Paul becoming *all things to all men*, we have an illustration of how valuable a person's eternal spirit is (compare Lk. 15:4-10). Holman (7:154-155) said: "Exactly how can we be all things to all people? First, we need to develop a love for others that motivates us to seek their good above our rights. We need to repent of our self-centeredness and cold hearts and begin to feel a compassion for the lost that makes us eager to do whatever it takes to bring them the gospel."

In view of the preceding information Paul's asking the Corinthians to surrender some of their liberties for weaker brethren was simply a request to do what He had done on many occasions and was continuing to do. He wanted them to make the type of sacrifice he had often made because saving souls is always more important than personal liberties (freedom). When we look at the life of Jesus, we find that He acted in a similar way. Jesus used different techniques to reach different people (contrast His interaction with Nicodemus in Jn. 3 and His conversation with a Samaritan woman in Jn. 4). Jesus also sacrificed for the sake of others. He "emptied" Himself to the point of servanthood (Phil. 2:7) so He, too, could save the souls of men.

9:23: *And I do all things for the gospel's sake, that I may be a joint partaker thereof.*

In some translations the end of this verse is noticeably different. The KJV says, "*that I might be a partaker thereof with you.*" The ASV says, "*I may be a joint partaker thereof.*" The ASV omits "*with you*" (this correctly puts the emphasis on Paul). Paul told the Corinthians he had to take care of his own soul. If he wanted to be a *joint partaker* of eternal life, he had to do what was necessary so he would be saved. Thus, he "*did all things for the gospel's sake.*" Paul was not only motivated for the sake of others (verses 20-22), he was motivated because of the gospel (the information we now call the New Testament). In fact, his life was bound up in the gospel of Christ—this was why he lived and worked (compare Gal. 2:20). His zeal for New Testament Christianity is further expressed by the fact that "do" is a present tense verb. Paul was no "Sunday morning Christian." Just as Jesus was always seeking to do the Father's will (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 14:31; 15:10), such was true of Paul.

Allen (p. 113) cited Dods who said Paul "was not himself saved by proclaiming salvation to others, no more than the baker is fed by making bread for others or the physician kept in health by prescribing for others. Paul had a life of his own to lead, a duty of his own to discharge, a soul of his own to save; and he recognized that what was laid before him as the path to salvation was to make himself entirely the servant of others." Paul expressed a similar thought to the Philippians (2:12b) when he told them to "work out their own salvation." This was what Paul did and we are to follow his example. Christians must

continually be “looking unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:2) and “running the race set before them” (Heb. 12:1). Although the Bible is very clear on this point, some fail to be obedient. There are Christians who devote so much time and energy to saving others their own souls are left unnourished and unprepared for eternity. All need the “*gospel*” (*euangelio*) and this includes those who teach it. For a special study on the word *gospel*, see the commentary on 1 Cor. 15:1-2.

9:24-25: *Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run; that ye may attain. 25 And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they (do it) to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

In the closing verses of this chapter Paul described rigid training and the imagery is based upon first century athletic games. Several passages in the Bible refer to ancient athletic contests to illustrate the Christian life (compare Phil. 3:14; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:7; Lk. 13:24; Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). “The Corinthians loved athletics. They sponsored the biannual Isthmian Games, which were second in importance only to the Olympic Games. They held these games only ten miles from Corinth, so most people in Corinth would have been familiar with the goals and practices of the games. They also would have had the opportunity to observe these games. Paul was in Corinth in A.D. 50-52, so he would have been present for the Isthmian Games held in the spring of A.D. 51” (Holman, 7:156).

The Olympic Games began in 776 B.C. and lasted into the fourth century A.D. Participants competed in the nude, and just like people today, were not above cheating to win a contest (athletes were able to receive up to \$300,000 in today’s currency if they won). In spite of swearing “sacred oaths to obey and play by the rules,” some were not true to their word. In some cases athletes uttered curses against their opponents in hopes of getting the upper hand. For those who lost, they sometimes made their way home using back alleys.

The expression “*Know ye not*” is expressed with the perfect tense and it is rhetorical. In other words, “Of course, the Corinthians know all about this. Since the days of Alexander the Great athletic contests, held in public stadia, had become popular in the entire Hellenic world, and the world came in crowds to these athletic fields” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 382). It was not unlike our time when crowds “throng to the great college games and to baseball matches in the major and even in the minor leagues” (ibid).

Just as modern professional athletes must work hard and practice self-control to become a winner (a little practice once or twice a week is not enough), such is also true for Christians. We cannot read the Bible once in a while and attend a few services and go to heaven. If ancient athletes trained as often and as regularly as some Christians practice the faith of the New Testament, they would not have qualified for a junior varsity team, let alone an Olympic team.

Ancient athletes competed in “six events: wrestling, jumping, javelin and discus throwing, and most importantly for Paul’s analogy, racing and boxing” (Holman, 7:156). We do not know the exact qualifications for the Isthmian Games, but they may have been similar to the Olympic Games. Contestants in the Olympic Games were under strict rules: “Only free men could participate in the games, and they had to provide proof that for 10 months before the contest they had participated in the necessary preliminary training, as well as spending the last 30 days in exercises in the gymnasium. The winner and his family were honored, and when he returned to his native city, a breach was made in the city walls to allow him to enter, indicating that with such a man they had no need of walls for defense. He also received a prominent seat at all future contests. In the Greek games only one won the prize” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 375). Second and third place finishers could obtain a “public mention,” but only the first place winner received a prize. Additional information about these games may be found in the commentary on Heb. 12:1b.

Verse 24 says Christians have a “race” they must “*run*” (present tense) so they may “*attain*” (“*obtain*,” KJV) the eternal prize of life everlasting (compare Heb. 12:1-2). *Run* reminds us of not only commitment and perseverance, but there may be the existence of difficult terrain and other unfavorable conditions. Being a Christian is possible for all, but it is not always an easy way of life. Each step we take brings us closer to our final destination.

The word *attain* (*katalambano*) is also used in Phil. 3:12-13 (it occurs twice in Phil. 3:12). The word “prize” (*brabeion*) is only found here and Phil. 3:14. “In Philippians it shows above all that the goal of the Christian race (of life) has not yet been reached. In 1 Corinthians, however, it challenges everyone to a strenuous and methodical Christian fulfillment of life. But it does not say that only *one* will win the prize” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:226). ““Entering the race is not winning it; do not be satisfied with running, but make sure of winning—*So run that you may secure (the prize)!*”” (Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:855). “The prize was generally a wreath but the winner was also rewarded w. fame and popularity” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 416).

At the beginning of verse 25 we find another important term (“*striveth*”). This word (*agonizomai*) is a present tense verb and it is used seven times in the New Testament. In Classical Greek it described conflict, contests, debates, and legal suits. For some of the other places it occurs in the New Testament see Lk. 13:24; Jn. 18:36 (“*fight*”); and 1 Tim. 4:10 (“*fight*”). In 1 Cor. 9:25 it is comparable to “engaging in an athletic contest. It was used figuratively here to represent the rigid denial a Christian must bring into his life just as the athlete exercises self-control in all things. The stress here is on personal discipline” (CBL, GED, 1:69).

The verb translated “*self control*” (*enkrateuomai*) is also in the present tense and it is used only here and 7:9. In both these passages it describes “the opposite of self-gratification. The proper attitude of the believer is to be one of self-control over all desires, especially his sexual desires” (CBL, GED, 1:213). MacKnight (p. 172) noted how those “who taught the gymnastic art, prescribed to their disciples the kind of meat that was proper, the quantity they were to eat, and the hours at which they were to eat.” They “prescribed to them likewise the hours of their exercise and rest. They forbade them the use of wine and women” (ibid).

The word “*incorruptible*” at the end of verse 25 (*aphthartos*) is only found here; 15:52; Rom. 1:23; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:4, 23; 3:4. It always has the sense of “that which constantly endures, that which is no longer subject to corruption, that which is immortal and imperishable” (CBL, GED, 1:501). “*Corruptible*” (*phthartos*) describes something that perishes (notice that this is the same spelling for the Greek word *incorruptible* except for the “*a*” at the beginning of the word. The addition of the “*a*” completely changes the meaning of the word, just like “*theist*” is changed to “*atheist*”). For the other places in the New Testament where this term occurs, see Rom. 1:23; 1 Cor. 15:53, 54; 1 Pet. 1:18, 23. The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:856) noted how “The ‘garland’ of the victor in the Isthmian Games was of *pine* leaves, at an earlier time of *parsley*, in the Olympian Games of *wild olive*; yet these were the most coveted honours in the whole Greek world.” We should seek the heavenly abode created for us by God (Heb. 11:10).

It may be useful to contrast man’s earthly athletic games with Christianity.

ATHLETIC GAMES	HEAVEN
Temporal crowns (wreaths) given by men	Eternal and given by Christ
Limited number of winners	All can win
Athletes must be the best, strongest, fastest	All the faithful can win
Most winners are forgotten with time	The winners will be known for eternity
The race is over and life continues	Eternal life begins when the race ends

9:26-27: *I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: 27 but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.*

Here is the conclusion to Paul’s instructions about the Christian race. He ran “*without uncertainty*” (KJV). The ASV says, “*not uncertainly.*” This means he was aware of the goal (eternal life). He was not wandering aimlessly in his spiritual life. He knew what he wanted, he knew how to get it, and he was persistently pursuing it (compare verse 23 and the comments on that verse). “He who runs with a clear aim looks straight and runs straight to the goal, casts away every weight, pays no regard to what bystanders say, and sometimes is but aroused even by a fall” (Bengel, 2:214). *Uncertainly* (*adelos*) occurs only here in the New Testament. Gingrich and Danker (p. 16) defined it “as one who has no fixed goal.”

To ensure the Corinthians knew that getting to heaven is not easy, Paul turned to another illustration in 26b—*fighting*. “*Fight*” (*pukteuo*) is a present tense verb that occurs only here in the New Testament and it refers to *boxing*. Paul said he was not like an unskilled boxer (someone who misses his mark and ends up “*beating the air*”). “To strike a terrific blow which lands on the air instead of on the opponent brings a laugh from the spectators” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 385). Paul was like a skilled boxer. Just as a knowledgeable fighter knows when and where to throw a punch, so Paul knew how to engage in the fight for eternal life. The verbs *fight* and *beat* are both in the present tense and are quite vivid. The CBL (GED, 5:385) noted that “Ancient Greek boxing did not use gloves, but fighters had thongs tied to their hands and wrists. There also were no timed rounds or a specific area in which to fight.”

Verse 27 builds upon the information in verse 26 by continuing the imagery of a physical contest. Here Paul said he had to keep his body under control to reach his goal of heaven (compare Gal. 5:17). Paul kept his life in order by “*buffeting*” himself (the KJV says, “*I keep under my body*”). “*Buffet*” (*hupopiazō*) is only used here and Lk. 18:5 (Jesus used it to describe a widow who *wearied* a judge). This term meant to “strike someone on the face (under the eyes) in such a way that he gets a ‘black eye’ and is disfigured as a result” (Kittel, 8:590). In Lk. 18 the word may indicate the judge’s prestige had been so injured and disgraced it was like his face had been blackened. It is also possible to view the widow in Jesus’ story as someone who was so desperate she might have hit the judge in the face (Kittel, 8:591). Here *buffet* is a present tense verb and it must be understood figuratively (Paul did not actually hit himself). *Buffet* means Paul kept his passions and life (his entire being) under control so he would not lose the heavenly race. “Athletes love to crow in advance about their certain victory. Paul’s case is altogether different” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 385).

The word “*bondage*” (*doulagōgeō*) is translated “*subjection*” in the KJV. It is found only here in the New Testament and it is also a present tense verb. In Classical Greek *bondage* described people who were captured and made slaves. Both this word and the present tense tell us that Paul’s becoming a Christian did not fully remove his temptation to sin or always keep him from ever sinning (he made this same point in Rom. 7:14, 15—see the commentary on these two passages). Though a Christian and an apostle, Paul was like everyone else—his Christian life was a race and struggle.

By combining the verbs “*buffet*” and “*bondage*” Paul gave “the picture of the athlete who does all to discipline himself and to keep his body under rigorous control, in order that it might serve and not hinder

his progress to the goal” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 417). Some have said it is “easy to love Jesus, but loving Jesus is not easy.” If by this someone means the “person of Jesus is easy to love” (or many of His teachings are very attractive), the statement is true. Christianity is a very attractive way of life, but it does require a significant amount of on-going effort.

Paul brought his desires and life into subjection to God “*lest by any means*” he should be “*rejected*” (the KJV says “*be a castaway*”). The adverb *lest* (*mepos*) “occurs after verbs of fear or apprehension to voice a speaker’s negative reservation” (CBL, GED, 4:191). Paul knew that even though he was an apostle, he could fall from grace (lose his salvation). This point is so clear and forceful those who deny that Christians can lose their salvation have had to resort to very twisted logic—the type of reasoning found in the Bible Knowledge commentary (p. 525). This source wrongly said: “Like the brother who had indulged in immorality (1 Cor. 5:1-5), Paul’s life could be cut short by the disciplinary disapproval of God. God had disciplined in the past (10:6-10), was disciplining in the present (11:30-32), and would discipline in the immediate future (5:5). Paul was concerned that some might not be able to say with him one day, ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race’ (2 Tim. 4:7), but would find themselves cut off in the midst of the contest by the disciplinary action of God.”

Paul did not have in mind his life being “cut short” (God lessening his number of years on the earth). He was worried about becoming a *castaway* (*adokimos*). This term described a person or thing that failed to pass a test and was therefore disqualified (rejected). *Castaway* was “used with reference to ancient coins which were always weighed and otherwise carefully tested; the genuine and the full-weight coins were accepted as ‘proven,’ and others were rejected as ‘disproven’” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 388). It was also the term used for disqualified contestants in the Grecian games (Willis, p. 252). “At the Greek games, there was a herald who announced the rules of the contest, the names of the contestants, and the names and cities of the winners. He would also announce the names of any contestants who were disqualified” (Warren Wiersbe, First Corinthians, p. 602). A good definition for *castaway* is “not standing the test” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:33). If a person does not pass God’s test, the end result will *not* be salvation—it will be eternal condemnation in hell. If a person is seeking eternal life but fails to win the race, he will be lost.

Introduction to chapter 10:

In the opening verse of chapter 10 the ASV uses the word “*for*” and the KJV says “*moreover*.” Both words alert readers to the fact that Paul is continuing to deal with the same subject. In the 8th chapter Paul spoke of eating idol meat. He said that even though this practice was not wrong, it should be avoided if fellow Christians were bothered by it. The Corinthians, however, believed they could do whatever they wanted, even if their actions wounded the conscience of fellow Christians (10:23, “all things are lawful”). This unloving attitude caused Paul to say in the 9th chapter, “We must work out our own salvation. We are in a race. There is a chance we will not finish the course and be saved” (9:27). Inflicting hurt on a fellow athlete (Christian) is a basis for being disqualified from the race and losing the prize (heaven).

Understanding the previous two chapters permits readers to easily and quickly grasp the material in chapter 10. The Corinthians had concluded, “Because we have been baptized (12:13), we are in Christ, we belong to God, and we can do whatever we want. We are even allowed to eat idol meat no matter what the circumstances are. Because we observe the Lord’s Supper and are members of the church, we do not need to run the Christian race.” Although this incorrect attitude was dealt with in the previous chapter, Paul continued to discuss it here and he used the nation of Israel as an example (Jude also used Israel to show that God will cut off His people if they are not obedient, Jude 5).

In using Israel as an illustration of God destroying people He previously saved, Paul used the word “all” five times in just four verses (10:1-4). He first appealed to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. God’s deliverance of the Egyptian nation is summed up quite well by Ps. 105:37: “*And he brought them forth with silver and gold; and there was not one feeble person among his tribes.*” Israel was extremely blessed by God, but its special status was conditional (10:6-10). Such was also true for the Christians at Corinth; even Christians can be “severed” from their savior (Gal. 5:4, ASV). We are only saved disciples “if” we

abide in God's word (Jn. 8:31; Jn. 15:6).

Just as many first century Jews felt spiritually secure because of their ties to Abraham (Mt. 3:9), so some of the Corinthians felt spiritually secure because they had a *supper* (verse 16) and *baptism* (verse 2; 12:13). In this chapter Paul warned his brethren that things like baptism and the Lord's Supper are not enough. These items are absolutely necessary, but they are only part of the gospel. We must do all that we find in the gospel to be saved (Rom. 1:16 + Lk. 17:10). We only possess "eternal security" if we are "walking in the light" (1 Jn. 1:7). Living in this manner means obeying the Lord's commandments (Jn. 14:15; 15:14).

By studying the information in verses 1-14 we get a glimpse of what first century Bible classes may have been like. Information from the Scriptures was *selected* (in this case information about Israel's exodus), *studied* and then *applied* to daily life. In this case Christians were reminded of Israel's sin and failure to enter into the promise land. Paul drew attention to *what the text said*, a proper *interpretation* of the information (explained the meaning of the text), and then provided *application* (how this information applies to the Christian life). This is still the best way to teach and preach.