

In chapter 9, Paul continues to deal with the theme of the believer’s proper exercise of liberty in Christ. He closed chapter 8 with a passionate statement about his concern for his brother: He was willing to never again eat meat if it would protect his brother’s conscience. Lest his words be misconstrued as mere theory, he writes chapter 9 to prove his passionate statement. His own life was an example of foregoing liberties for the benefit of others. He might not have been able to show them a willingness to give up meat for the sake of others (because he was not *in* Corinth), but there was another example he could point to in order to prove his claim: his willingness to forego material remuneration for the sake of those to whom he ministered.

## The Issue (9:1–6)

To the progressives in Corinth, who were forever crying, “Liberty!” Paul writes, “Am I not free?” The progressives stood firmly on their liberties, unwilling to give them up for the sake of others. Paul begins by exhorting them that he also had certain rights—that he was also “free.”

He goes on, “Am I not an apostle?” He is building up to something here. As any other Christian, he had certain rights—as an *apostle*, he had specific liberties that perhaps others did not have. His apostleship was not in question: He was an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ, and his ministry produced the fruit of apostleship. This particular church was a “seal of [his] apostleship in the Lord.”

Having established that he also had liberty, and that he had the same authority as the other apostles, Paul now moves to a concrete example of his claim in 8:13. If anyone wanted to “examine” his claim there, he was willing to give evidence. He was willing to point to a “right” that he had foregone for the benefit of others. That “right” was the right to financial remuneration.

It seems that no one questioned the authority of Peter and the other apostles to “eat and drink” (i.e. to be materially remunerated for their ministry). The Corinthians were even willing to support the wives of the other apostles. But he and Barnabas had actively foregone this right—seemingly without question. The Corinthians seemingly did not raise the matter of financial remuneration for Paul and Barnabas, though they were happy to provide it for Peter and the other apostles.

### TO THINK ABOUT

What does it look like for a church to financially support its minister(s)? What considerations should be given when a church decides what its staff’s remuneration looks like? Who should be involved in this important decision-making process?

## The Arguments (9:7–12a)

Having established that he was a “free” apostle, Paul now goes on to indicate what, exactly, that meant in terms of rights. As an apostle, instrumental in the founding of this church, he had a right to expect that the church would support him financially. He appeals to a twofold reasoning.

In the first place, “human authority” supported his claim to rightful support (vv. 7–8a). A soldier enjoys the support of the government for which he is fighting. A farmer can expect to benefit from his hard work of planting and tending. It is the common experience of every human society that labour is rewarded with payment.

But Paul will not leave a matter as important as this with just “human authority.” Instead, he appeals to “the Law of Moses” to argue the same (vv. 8b–9). He applies the law about not muzzling an ox (Deuteronomy 25:4) to the matter of ministerial compensation. Just as it was required to allow the ox to eat from the grain it was treading, so ministers of the gospel can expect to feed from the fruit of their labours.

In every sense, then—whether appealing to natural or divine authority—it was clear that Paul (and Barnabas) had the right to financial remuneration from this church to which they tirelessly ministered.

“Others” had claimed financial compensation for their ministry to this church, and yet the foundational work of Paul and Barnabas went uncompensated (v. 12).

## The Conclusion (9:12b–18)

In all of the above, Paul is setting the stage for what follows. He had made the claim that he would never again eat meat if it was in the best interests of his brother. That may have seemed theoretical, but his willingness to give up his right to financial compensation put hands and feet on his claim.

While he had every right to expect glad and generous support from the Corinthians, he neither asked for it nor accepted anything that was offered. The reason is that he did not want to “put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.” There were at least two ways that accepting remuneration could prove to be “an obstacle in the way of the gospel.”

First, he did not want to risk being lumped together with popular but godless leaders of the day. Peter and the other apostles preached largely to a Jewish audience, which understood the biblical mandate for a church to compensate its ministers. Paul, on the other hand, largely ministered to the unreached, who had no such familiarity with Old Testament principles. He did not want to come across as a greedy rhetorician who sought to earn a good living by presenting and winning arguments.

### TO THINK ABOUT

Is there a danger of pastors today being considered greedy if they address the matter of finances and financial compensation for the work they do? Should a pastor ever publicly broach the subject of finances and financial compensation? How can a man at the same time hold firmly to the principles taught in this section and remain free of accusation of greed?

Second, in places like Corinth, citizens were happy to compensate strong and popular teachers, because compensation meant control. Those who held the money often held the strings. Paul did not want the Corinthians to somehow think that they could control him because they paid him.

### TO THINK ABOUT

Does it still happen in churches today that those who hold the purse also hold the strings? How can a vocationally-supported pastor avoid becoming a puppet to those who hold the purse in their churches?

Of course, none of this negated the reality that he had a right to compensation. He could have educated them to show the biblical warrant for financial remuneration. He could have easily accepted remuneration and shown his refusal to be controlled. Instead, he chose to “not make use of this right” and instead “endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.”

### TO THINK ABOUT

Should ministers today follow Paul’s lead in not making use of the right to financial compensation? It seems that the Twelve made use of this right that Paul chose to forego (vv. 5–6). Why was that? Whose example should be followed—Paul’s or Peter’s? Knowing that pastors who are financially supported by their churches often wrestle with these very issues, how can a church help alleviate some of the tension that the pastor feels in his own mind about finances?

As we wrestle with this text and the matter of financial obligations of the church to its minister(s), let us not forget the overriding context. Paul is arguing for the need for Christians to, in love, forego their rights for the benefit of the gospel and the people of God. The specific context of giving up the right to financial compensation was just one way that Paul put feet to his claim that he would be willing to never again eat meat if that was in the best interests of his brother. That is the heart of the matter, which Paul wanted every believer—financially supported by the church or not—to develop toward brothers and sisters in Christ.