

## **SERIES: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR A HEALTHY & HOLY CHURCH:**

A Study in 1 Corinthians Applied To The Church Today

### **III. MAINTAINING PROPER DIET & EXERCISE**

#### **B.) FREEDOM TO CHOOSE FITNESS**

## **“ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING” (1 Cor. 9:1-18)**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

In Christ we are FREE! The question, though, is “for what purpose are we free?” Yes, we do have the freedom to choose either to be fit and healthy or flabby and unhealthy. But did Christ purchase our freedom on the cross equally for either option? Of course not! He secured our freedom through His own sacrifice in order that we might exercise our newfound freedom to follow Him in His ways and for His purposes!

*There is much talk about our “Christian Liberty.” But what does that really mean?* In our text this morning, Paul answers this question for us as he responds to the Corinthians' challenges against his apostleship as a result of his choosing to be different than their expectations. **Imagine that?!**

**Friends, Christian Liberty that honors Christ starts with a . . .**

### **SEAL OF APPROVAL (vv. 1-2)**

- Paul begins this address with a defense of his apostleship, since everything else hinges on that issue.
- It is his apostleship appointed by Christ, and not his position, intelligence, training, or personality that is the basis of his authority to instruct and hold the Corinthians accountable according to God's Word and will.
- Paul begins his defense with a series of four rhetorical questions, each of which is expressed in a manner that clearly expects a positive answer.
- “*Am I not free?*” Of course I am, as are you. Not only you, but I also have Christian liberty.
- “*Am I not an apostle?*” Do you still need proof? Alrighty, then, consider . . .
- “*Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?*” One of the key requirements for being an apostle was to have personally seen and interacted with Jesus in His physical body. Though he was not a disciple of Christ during His earthly ministry, Paul had this experience when the resurrected Christ met him on the road to Damascus.
- “*Are you not my work in the Lord?*” The second criterion of apostleship is the establishment of new churches in previously unreached areas. The very existence of the Corinthian church, then, is testimony to Paul's true apostleship.
- What follows, he may and does address as one who – by their own witness and existence – has been sealed by Christ as an apostle with spiritual leadership over them. Further, if this is not the case and his apostleship and authority is not “*in the Lord*” then neither are they.

**Paul's seal of approval, given by Christ, authenticates his . . .**

### **MINISTERIAL RIGHTS (vv. 3-14)**

- The following argument of his ministerial rights is not meant to be complete or exhaustive, but to refer to those that have been specifically questioned by at least some within the church at

Corinth.

- Part of the problem was that the Corinthian Christians were forming their expectations and judgments of their spiritual leaders and teachers in the same way as they had been taught to do for the philosophers and spiritual teachers so prevalent in their pagan city. e.g. Dr. Phil, Oprah, Dali Lama, Mother Teresa, etc.
- In the Greco-Roman world, it was common and expected that philosophers and teachers would make their 'living' either by charging fees, patronage (the generous endowment from a wealthy benefactor), begging or working. Different groups argued for or against these various options.
- It seems that in Corinth, the expected form of compensation for a Christian leader had become that of patronage. Because Paul instead chose to support his ministry himself through his own trade work, some questioned his true apostleship, authority, wisdom and spiritual maturity.
- In addition, they challenged these things on the basis that he traveled alone as an unmarried man (likely a widower).
- In other words, the attitude was: **“If you don't do these things in just the same way as these others that we have accepted and looked up to, then you must not really be as spiritual or authentic as they are.”**
- *Amazing, isn't it, how some things never seem to change – even across vast spaces of time and cultural change?*
- In response to these accusations, Paul specifically addresses what are the true ministerial rights of an apostle of Christ.

**a.) Defined (vv. 3-6)**

- 1.) To receive just compensation from the church.**
- 2.) To have a wife with him in the ministry.**
- 3.) Not to have to work outside of the ministry.**

**b.) Defended (vv. 7-14)**

- Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, continues to demonstrate the absurdity of their judgments and assumptions with another series of rhetorical questions that illustrate the obvious hypocrisy and injustice of what they expect and even demand.
- If soldiers are compensated to go to war, farmers from their crops, and shepherds from the herds they look after, why shouldn't the Christian minister be supported by the local church?
- **“Do not muzzle an ox . . .” Deuteronomy 25:4.** Even God's law recognizes this for the rights of a work-animal! Even the Law ensures that the ox, who is used to pull the threshing-sledge that removes the kernels from the wheat stalks, must be allowed to graze from those kernels for its work.
- *Should not then the minister of Christ who 'sows' spiritual fruit for the benefit of others in return receive comparable material benefit from them?*
- **Scripture plainly argues here that patronage is not the biblical means of support for God's ministers, but rather the most biblical model is for all of the church to contribute to their support!**
- Paul further supports and cements this truth through the example of OT law concerning the provision of the temple priests and that, while specific circumstances have changed, this principle of providing for God's representative ministers remains.
- If there is any remaining question, Paul also refers to Jesus' own teachings on this matter.
- **Luke 10:7**
- **Matthew 10:10**

Yet, there is also a . . .

## LIBERTY TO **SACRIFICE** (vv. 15-18)

- True Christian Liberty, Scripture here asserts through Paul, is that most modeled and given for us by Christ: SACRIFICE!
- **It is the freedom to choose which rights we shall exercise, how, when and for whom in order that we may best Love God Absolutely and Love Others Sacrificially!!!**
- Therefore, having strongly defended his apostleship, authority and ministerial rights, Paul then goes on to explain how and why he has nevertheless *voluntarily* given up (sacrificed) these rights for the sake of God and those whom He loves.
- In no way and at no time do they cease being his ministerial rights or the expected obligation of the church. Rather, Paul chooses (even insists) that *in the present environment and circumstances* he would best live out his absolute love for God and sacrificial love for others by giving up these particular rights.
- To paraphrase, **Paul's point is this:** *“My call and charge from Christ is to preach the gospel freely and to as many as I possibly can. Because He has placed this charge on me, His servant, I am obligated to carry it out regardless of whether or not others honor or support it. Therefore, if they do not understand, offer, agree or properly provide according to their charge, I will yet do whatever is necessary to carry out my charge. And, in doing so, nobody can accuse me of fulfilling my charge either from a motivation of money NOR for the sake of pleasing my benefactors or supporters. My boast is solely in the Lord Jesus! His gospel is free and I give it freely.”*
- **Please, brothers and sisters in Christ**, this passage of Scripture needs to be understood in its continuity as a whole thought.
- **The first description is how it should be. However, even when that is not honored so, the appointed minister of Christ must not let that in any way hinder his ministry of the gospel!**

## APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

### **Pastors:**

- Even though an apostle is not the same as a pastor, the principles that Scripture here addresses are relevant for both!
- This means that there is biblical support, if not even mandate, for justly paid pastors in our churches.
- It also means that pastors should not let the hang-ups and deficiencies of others ever hinder the fulfilling of the call and charge the Lord Jesus has given them – even if that means sacrificing one's 'rights' for His glory!
- Personal application 1: I have never allowed compensation to become an issue in my role as a pastor at any of the 3 churches I have served. I have always believed, taught others and lived out that if one is called one goes and fulfills the call. Whether or not others share their part in that is between them and the Lord. In fact, I didn't even know what my compensation would be here until after I had already moved and started working.

- Personal application 2: Similarly, contrary to popular and suggested practice, I have made a point *not* to charge for counseling or marriage ceremonies so as not to inhibit any that may thusly receive the gospel.

### **Missionaries:**

- While the specifics and logistics are necessarily different, the same principles also apply to missionaries.
- **It is both a shame and a boasting** *that many missionaries today (including many that we support) receive significantly less than 100% of their designated support and yet frequently continue to minister in their fields without hesitation or bitterness.* It is a shame that God's people are not consistently faithful in supporting them properly. Yet, it is a boasting that they have the Christian character and commitment to do everything they can to not let this hinder their mission from God! (sometimes, even that is not enough). Praise be for this church's commitment!

### **Lay People:**

- For lay people, those Christians who are not appointed to vocational service, the larger principles also apply.
- First, the willingness and obedience to provide for God's called ones.
- Second, the willingness and obedience to also be willing to give up their 'rights' for the sake of the gospel.

Ray Stedman writes about a conversation he once had with a young Christian who said to him, “*I don't like to be told that I can't drink or dance just because it might offend someone else's conscience. That sounds like legalism to me.*” Pastor Stedman replied, “*I can identify with that. Like you, I don't like to be told what I can and cannot do, just because it might offend someone else. But the Bible calls that rebellious part of me 'the flesh.' It's the enemy within each of us that seeks to destroy our effectiveness for God. If we want God to use us to reach others, we need to love Him enough to deny the flesh and limit our liberty*” (Letters To A Troubled Church, pg. 130).

Personal Testimony: Decision to cut hair and stop wearing an earring. Alcohol.

**THE GREATEST 'RIGHT' WE HAVE IS THE RIGHT TO  
GIVE UP OUR RIGHTS SO THAT WE MAY  
LOVE GOD ABSOLUTELY  
& OTHERS SACRIFICIALLY!  
(repeat together x2)**

- 1.) What 'rights' of others does the Lord want you to better honor & respect?**
- 2.) What 'rights' do you at this time need to give up for the sake of His glory?**