

THE RIGHTS OF A MINISTER

1 CORINTHIANS 09:01–15

Introduction

The rights of a minister are often the subject of churches, especially in the area of livelihood and financial support. Too often, churches are guilty of neglecting their ministers and of allowing pastoral support to become a divisive issue. The issue is a subject next to God's heart as this passage and its length clearly indicate. (See outline and notes, Mt. 10:9-10; Lk. 10:7; Ph. 4:10-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18.)

- I. The right to be accepted as a minister (vv. 1-3).
- II. The right to be supported (vv. 4-11).
- III. The right to be the first person supported by the church (vv. 12-14).
- IV. The right to make the judgment about receiving wages or not (v. 15).

I. 1 Corinthians 09:01–03 Right of a Minister to be Accepted

The minister has the right to be accepted as a minister. Paul was a true minister of God. In fact, he was an apostle, one of the few who had actually seen the Lord Jesus Christ. However, there were those in the Corinthian church who did not like Paul. They did not like such things as...

- his messages
- his charisma
- his preaching style
- his authoritativeness
- his life-style
- his appearance
- his doctrine

Therefore, they set out to get rid of Paul and to destroy his ministry. They attempted to do this by turning the whole Corinthian church against him. (See note, *Paul, Accusations Against*, 2 Cor. 1:12-22.)

This is what lies behind the present passage. Paul declares his right to be accepted as a minister, and he expands his declaration to include every minister of the gospel. Every minister has the right to be accepted as a minister.

1. Paul has the call as a minister. His particular call was to be an apostle. Note how his questions would pierce the heart of anyone who knew of him and his ministry.
=> *Am I* not an apostle? Are you saying that I am not called of God? That God has not called me to be a servant and a minister for Him? That I am not to preach and bear witness to Christ?
=> *Am I* not free in Christ? Free to do as He wills, to minister and serve among God's people as the other ministers of God? Am I not free to serve the Lord as He wills?
=> *Have I* not seen Jesus our Lord? Has He not revealed Himself to me and called me? Are you saying I do not know what I am talking about? That I have not seen Christ? That I do not know Christ? That I do not walk in Christ and serve Christ?
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The word “not” (ouchi) is much more forceful in the last question. Paul is laying stress upon the fact that he had definitely seen the Lord. This was one of the major requirements for the early apostles (Acts 9:17, 27; 18:9-10; 22:14, 17f; 2 Cor. 12: 1f).

⇒ Are you not part of my work in the Lord? Has the Lord not used me in the lives of the believers? In the ministry of the church?

2. Paul had borne fruit as a minister which was evidence of his call. Note the contrast: others may question Paul’s call of God, but *surely not the Corinthians*. Many of them had been led to the Lord by Paul. The very fact that some of them were saved under his ministry was proof of his call. Any who wished to examine his call could look at the believers at Corinth. The salvation of some and the growth of others are his answer to those who examine the credentials of his call and ministry.

Thought 1. Too often a minister of the gospel suffers rejection and opposition just because someone dislikes something about him. In such cases the minister has two answers:

- 1) The Lord’s call and the minister’s knowledge of His call.
- 2) The fruit which the minister has borne in the salvation and growth of people.

Rom 14:4 *Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

Rom 14:13 *Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.*

1 Cor 4:5 *Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.*

Phil 2:3-4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

James 4:12 *There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you — who are you to judge your neighbour?*

II. **1 Corinthians 09:04–11 Right of a Minister to be Supported**

The minister has the right to be supported. Paul asserts three rights dealing with the church supporting the minister financially, then he gives five supporting arguments. The word “right” (exoosia) means authority or power throughout this passage.

1. The right to be fed. The minister and his family have to eat; therefore, it is the church’s duty to provide food for their ministers.
2. The right to receive travel support. The ministers of Paul’s day were always travelling about ministering among a number of churches. Ministers of every generation have

had travel expenses; therefore, it is the responsibility of the churches to provide the travel expenses. Note two things.

- a. The apostles and other ministers took their families with them as they travelled about ministering. This seems to indicate that most of them were married.
- b. The reference to the “brothers of the Lord” is a strong testimony to the deity of Christ. His own half-brothers who had lived with him day by day became followers and ministers after His resurrection (cp. Mt. 13:55-56).
3. The right to receive enough income that he can minister full time (v. 6). Paul says that he and Barnabas worked and earned their own living while ministering in Corinth. But they had the right to be supported by the church.
4. The supportive arguments. Note how clearly the issue is illustrated and seen in these arguments. The church is unquestionably responsible for the support of its ministers.
 - a. The soldier’s right: What soldier goes to war at his own expense? The minister is a soldier of Christ. He is leading the people of God in their spiritual warfare. He is, therefore, to be supported by those who engage him to lead the battle.
 - b. The farmer’s right: What farmer plants his vineyard and does not eat of the fruit? The minister is a farmer who sows the seed of the Word of God. He plants and harvests the fruit for the Lord and for the church. Therefore, the church is to see that he reaps of the harvest and eats of the fruit.
 - c. The shepherd’s right: What shepherd feeds a flock and does not eat of the milk of the flock? The minister is the shepherd of God’s flock and feeds God’s flock; therefore, he is to be fed and supported by the flock.
 - d. The law or Word of God says this right belongs to a minister. Paul says he does not have to speak as a man using human illustrations to prove his point. The Word of God says the same thing:

1 Cor 9:9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it about oxen that God is concerned? (cp. Dut. 25:4)

Note the question: “Is it about oxen that God is concerned?” Yes, he has provided in His Word for oxen. Men are to feed the oxen, for the oxen serve men. If God expects men to take care of the beasts who serve them, how much more does He expect men to take care of the ministers who labour for their spiritual welfare?

- e. The conclusion is forceful: these things are written for the sake of God’s people. The Greek is emphatic in its stress: these things are said entirely, with all certainty, most assuredly for our sakes. Therefore, the minister or preacher of the gospel should *labour and labour diligently* in hope, for God shall reward his hope. God will see to it that the minister shall partake of his hope. God will see to it that the minister has the necessities of life (cp. Mt. 6:24-34).

5. The central question is direct: Does spiritual labour merit material wage? Does ministering the highest qualities of life to people deserve pay? Such qualities as proclaiming and teaching and encouraging...

- salvation and redemption
- love, joy, peace
- faith, meekness, control
- life, both abundant and eternal
- long-suffering, gentleness, goodness

The answer is obvious. There is no question, for there is no greater need than ministering to people in proclaiming and teaching the great qualities for which all men long.

Mat 10:9-10 Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.

1 Cor 9:14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

Gal 6:6 Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share [give, support] all good things with his instructor.

Phil 4:14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.

1 Tim 5:18 For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

III. 1 Corinthians 09:12–14 Right of a Minister to be Supported First

The minister has the right to be the first person supported by the church. The question is incriminating: if others have the right to be supported by the church, does not the minister have the first right of support? The Corinthian church had recognized the rights of others to receive support, but they had tragically neglected Paul. Imagine a church neglecting to adequately support Paul! What he has to say is an indictment against the church at Corinth and any other church that fails in this God-given obligation.

1. The support of the minister is not to be abused by either the church or the minister (v. 12). Paul did not demand support when he was at Corinth (a three-year ministry initially). Note that he says he suffered all things; that is, he suffered hunger and all kinds of deprivations, and the idea is that he suffered them silently. He told no one. Why? Because there were some who opposed his ministry, and they would have charged him with being worldly minded or being in the ministry only for money or having wrong motives or a host of other false accusations. Paul just did not want to hamper the gospel in any way whatsoever. However, the church failed Paul and failed him miserably. It did not care for him nor look after him as it should have. Imagine his suffering from lack of food, adequate and proper clothing, and adequate housing!

Mat 8:20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

2. The historical practice of supporting ministers is to be closely observed: ministers have always gotten their share of the altar. Ministers who have ministered holy things to people have always lived of the altar or temple, that is, been supported because he proclaimed God from the altar.
3. The Lord himself has ordained that ministers live of the gospel. This is the supreme authority, the Lord Himself. The Lord demands: if a man preaches the gospel, he is to live of the gospel.

Mat 10:9-10 Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.

Luke 10:7-8 Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you."

IV. 1 Corinthians 09:15 Right of a Minister to Receive Compensation

The minister has the right to make the judgment about receiving wages or not. Paul made the decision not to receive a wage from the Corinthians. This was simply his strategy with the Corinthians. It enabled him to face his enemies and to refute any charge of preaching for money. He did receive support in other situations (Ph. 4:10f). Note two points.

1. Paul clearly says that he has not written to shame the Corinthians into supporting him. His purpose has been to teach them how to treat their ministers.
2. Paul says he does not want the church to begin supporting him, for he is able to glory in his labour for Christ and the church. What he means is that he was able to face his enemies with confidence because he lived a life of self-denial.

Thought 1. The law of Christ is that ministers are to be supported by the people of God. However, circumstances sometimes dictate that ministers work at secular jobs, and these circumstances need to be acknowledged when they arise and judged on their own merits as they are carried to the Lord in prayer.

1 Tim 5:17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

Heb 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Mat 16:25 "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." ■