

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." ■

THE INSIDE LOOK AT A MINISTER (PART I): A COMPULSION TO PREACH AND TO MINISTER 1 CORINTHIANS 09:16–23

Introduction

This passage is an excellent look at the minister and what it is that compels him to minister.

- I. His compulsion: to preach the gospel (v. 16).
- II. His accountability: judgment and woe if he fails to preach (vv. 16-17).
- III. His reward: to gain the satisfaction of preaching the gospel freely (v. 18).
- IV. His method: to become all things to all men (vv. 19-23).

I. 1 Corinthians 09:16 Ministers Preach the Gospel

The minister's compulsion: he must preach the gospel. Paul did not boast because he was called to be a minister. Being a preacher of the gospel was not a reason for boasting, any more than being a business man or a professional is a reason for glorying. He very clearly says, "yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast."

Paul was compelled (*epikeitai*) to preach the gospel. The word means to be pressed, laid upon, constrained, required, duty-bound to preach the gospel. God had called Paul to preach the gospel; therefore, it was his charge, his work, his business, his call in life. He could not do otherwise: he was compelled to preach. His preaching was not a matter of choice; he had not chosen to be a preacher. His preaching was a matter of duty. If he did not preach, he would be disobeying God and would miss the very purpose for his life upon earth.

Mark 16:15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

Acts 4:20 "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Acts 26:16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.'

1 Cor 9:16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

2 Tim 4:2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.

Isa 6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Isa 62:6 I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest.

Jer 20:9 But if I say, “I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,” his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. (cp. Gen. 12:1; Exo. 3:10; Judg. 6:14; 1 Kgs.19:19)

II. *1 Corinthians 09:16–17 The Compulsion to Preach*

The minister’s accountability: he faces judgment and woe if he fails to preach. This explains the necessity and compulsion to preach. One of the major reasons Paul was driven to preach the gospel was the terrible judgment that he would face if he failed. The word “woe” means that when he stood before God, he would have to face some terrible...

- regret
- denunciation
- distress
- grief
- disaster

No person who has ever been called by God is exempt from this coming judgment. This is made clear in what is now said (v. 17).

If Paul preached the gospel willingly, he had a reward. But if he preached unwillingly, “a trust of the gospel [was still] committed to him.” This simply means he was *still responsible* to preach the gospel even if he did it unwillingly or if he refused to do it. The word “trust” (*oikonomia*) means a stewardship, a dispensation. The steward was the manager of a large household or estate. The minister of God is the manager of God’s household and estate (church).

Once God had called Paul to preach, the stewardship and trust of preaching was his. Whether he followed through and preached did not matter; he was still responsible for preaching. There was no release from the call and duty. He would stand accountable for preaching the gospel or he would stand accountable for not preaching the gospel.

Thought 1. The call to preach the gospel is an awesome responsibility. God places the stewardship of the gospel into the hands of the person He calls. Just think about it: whatever the minister does with the gospel is all that will be done with the gospel — nothing more, nothing less. God has placed His gospel — the stewardship of it — into the hands of the persons He calls. Only what they do with the gospel will be done. What an awesome responsibility!

Col 1:25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

1 Th 2:4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

1 Tim 1:11 That conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

Titus 1:3 And at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour.

III. *1 Corinthians 09:18 Reward of Preaching the Gospel*

The minister's reward is that he gains the satisfaction of preaching the gospel freely. Paul had the power, that is, the *right*, to be paid by the Corinthian church; but he did not receive payment. Why? Because he wanted the reward of preaching the gospel free of charge. What was the reward?

=> The privilege of seeing people saved free of charge.

=> The confidence of the people in him, that he was free of greed.

=> The removal of any charge that he was in the ministry for comfort and money.

Thought 1. This does not mean that a minister is to work for nothing, nor that a church is not to pay its minister and pay him well (see 1 Cor. 9:1-15). It was simply Paul's strategy to keep those who opposed him so much from being able to charge him with preaching for comfort and money.

The lesson for us is clear: we must preach out of necessity and not for money. We must minister for the purpose of helping people and not to get gain. We must serve people and not use people.

Thought 2. Paul did sometimes support himself in the ministry.

Acts 18:3 And because he was a tent-maker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

Acts 20:34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.

Acts 28:30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

1 Cor 9:15 But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast.

1 Th 2:9 Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

2 Th 3:8 Nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

Thought 3. The minister of the gospel should constantly search his heart and make sure his heart is pure and cleansed of any wrong motive.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

1 Pet 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

IV. 1 Corinthians 09:19–23 Preaching Method

The minister's method is to become all things to all men. Paul says that he was "free and belonged to no man"; that is, he was not obligated to conform to any man's ideas or opinions. He had been set free in Christ and was obligated only to be conformed to Christ. But Paul surrendered himself, actually made himself a servant to all men. Why? So that he might win more men to Christ.

Note: Paul's going along with the opinions and customs of others does not mean he was compromising his convictions or being two-faced. It means that he was getting next to men, gaining their confidence and trust so they would pay attention to his witness for Christ.

1. Paul became as a Jew to the Jews, that is, to those who were under the law. When Paul was ministering to the Jews, he went along with their customs and laws just as long as nothing violated his walk in Christ. Note that Paul was not under the law.

Rom 10:4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Paul's standard was Christ, not the law. But he placed himself under the law when ministering to the Jews in order to get next to them and win their confidence and trust so he could witness to them. Note: Paul compromised with the Jews and all others when a principle was not involved. Acts 21:18-27 is a good example of just how far he would go to gain an entrance for the gospel. However, when a principle was at stake, he would not budge an inch (cp. Gal. 2:3-5).

2. Paul became a non-religionist to those who did not observe the law. But note a critical fact: he does not mean he became lawless and immoral. He still obeyed the law of God; that is, he was as always *under the law to Christ*. He still obeyed the will of Christ which actually includes the commandments of God and more. But Paul went along with the customs and life-style of the heathen just so they were not a violation of the law of Christ. He lived as a Gentile when among them in order to get next to them and win them to Christ.
3. Paul became weak to the weak Christians. That is, he went along with their petty rules and regulations. He refrained from doing some things that were perfectly legitimate. He conformed to their ideas and opinions just to have an open door to help them grow in Christ. He laid his personal liberty and rights aside in order to reach the new and weak Christians. He would not dare become a stumbling block to them, nor would he cause them to shut him out of their lives by offending them and thereby lose his opportunity to help them. He became as one of them in order to win them.
4. Paul clearly states his purpose for conforming to the customs and opinions of men:

1 Cor 9:22 I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

Paul is declaring that he went to the extreme when necessary in order to reach people for Christ. Note the word “this” (v. 23); it is usually translated “all things.” Paul declares that he did “all things” for the sake of the gospel. What mattered in life was not him and his rights, but the gospel. The gospel was the *consuming passion* of his life. Why? That he might partake of the gospel with other believers. By being faithful to the gospel he would share in the redemption of the gospel with other believers.

Mat 4:19 *“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”*

Mark 10:43-44 *“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”*

Rom 14:21 *It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.*

1 Cor 10:24 *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.*

Gal 6:2 *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*

Gal 6:10 *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Phil 2:4 *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Prov 11:30 *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.*

Dan 12:3 *Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. ■*