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Laying Aside Rights

9: 1-14

Laying aside rights DIG: Why does Paul make such a big deal about being an apostle? What is the implied answer to each of the questions in verse 1? Who was apparently contending that Paul wasn't a proper apostle? What rights did Paul have as an apostle? How did he illustrate his right to financial support? How did he lay aside his rights?

REFLECT: What "rights" do you have that God may want you to give up? Do you practice what you preach? In other words, do you walk the walk, or merely talk the talk? When was the last time you gave up your freedom in Messiah so as not to stumble a fellow believer? Have you stumbled a fellow believer and it cost you a friendship? How can you help others now?

The Lord said that those who proclaim the gospel should earn their living from the gospel.

Paul used one of the most basic of all principles of leadership: **he himself** practiced in **his** own life what **he** preached to others. The secret of the power and influence of the leaders of the first-century church wasn't just in the things they said, but the fact that they were themselves a living example of their own message.²²⁶

In **Chapter 8, Paul** set out the limits of our **freedom in Messiah, freedom** that is to be determined by brotherly and sisterly **love**, by concern for the welfare of other believers. **He** summarized the principle as: **Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble (8:9).** Our rights end when another person is offended. In **Chapter 9, the apostle** illustrates how **he** followed that principle in **his** own life. **In the first section of this chapter, Paul gives six reasons why he had the right to be supported by the churches in whom he had ministered.**

An analogy from Paul's own life (9:1-6): What unexpected vigor, **Paul** suddenly unleashes a torrent of rhetorical questions, each beginning with the Greek article *ou* (*is it not so?*), thus expecting a positive answer: Of course **I** am; of course **I** have; of course **you**

are. **Verse one** is composed of four questions, all falling into their natural order in terms of the argument.

Am I not a free man? This touches immediately back to **8:13**, where **Paul** had indicated his freedom to eat whatever **he** wanted, but **his** voluntary decision never to **eat meat** again if by doing so **he** would cause a fellow believer **to stumble**. **Am I not a free man?** Of course I am! I can **eat** anything I want.²²⁷ **The Corinthians** believed that **they** had **the freedom** to do anything **they** wanted, believing **themselves** to be **spiritually** mature enough to handle the pressures and stains of going into a pagan temple. **They** did not understand **Paul's** theology of serving **the Lord** as **an apostle**, why **he** did certain things, and most of all, why **he** did not do certain other things.²²⁸ Therefore, **he** set out to defend **his** own actions.

Closely related to the first question, **Paul** asks: **Am I not an apostle of the Messiah?** Of course **I** am! Most naturally, **Paul** includes the matter of **his apostleship**, since everything that follows hinged on that fact. This is the first direct statement in the letter indicating that **his apostleship** itself was at stake in **Corinth**; but such has been hinted at several times before this (**1:1** and **12, 4:1-5, 8-13** and **14-21, 5:1-2**).²²⁹

Paul's significant response to any of **his Corinthian** detractors, who did not think **he** was a proper **apostle**, was the question: **Haven't I seen Yeshua our Lord?** Of course **I** have! **An apostle** had to be an eyewitness of **Messiah** and of **His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22)**. **Paul** was not among the original **apostles** who were with **Yeshua** during **His** earthly ministry, but had seen **the resurrected Messiah** on at least three occasions. **The Lord** appeared to **Paul** at **his conversion (Acts 9:4-5)**, and in two visions that we know of (**Acts 18:9-10** and **22:17-18**). **Paul** could witness having personally met **the risen Messiah**.²³⁰

The next proof of **Paul's apostleship** was **the Corinthian believers themselves**. And **aren't you yourselves the result of my work for the Lord (9:1)?** The church at **Corinth** was one of the fruits of **Paul's** apostolic labors. **Their** saving faith and **their** knowledge of **God's Word** came from **Paul's** evangelism and discipling (see the commentary on **Acts**, to see link click [Cc](#) - **Many Respond to the Good News in Corinth**). **Paul** already alluded to **Corinth** as **God's field (3:9)** where **he** had been assigned as the servant of **ADONAI** at work. **He planted**, but **God gave the growth (3:6)**. **Paul** is careful to distinguish that **they** were not **his work**, about which **he** might have reason to boast, but **his work in the Lord**, so that **his** boasting would be **in the Lord (First Corinthians 1:30-31; Second Corinthians 10:17)**.²³¹

Even if to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the living proof that I am the Lord's apostle (9:2). Who are these other people questioning his apostleship? A short time later, Paul will go into an extended tirade against some imposters in Corinth, whom he labels false apostles . . . masquerading as apostles of Messiah (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Af - The Problem of the False Apostles**), and since one of their main criticisms of Paul was that he apparently didn't feel free to accept support for his ministry from them (**Second Corinthians 11:1-21**), it seems as though that hints of this issue are starting to surface here. Such information may have gotten to Paul verbally from Chloe's household (1:11). He, therefore took the opportunity to work that issue into his letter at this point, hoping that he could stop it before it spread much further.

Paul goes on to acknowledge that what he is about to write is a defense against those who were judging him. That is my defense when people put me under examination (9:3). We must be clear about one thing. What Paul is defending is the same issue that he defends so vigorously in his next letter, that he has a right to accept monetary support from the believers in Corinth, but out of his own free will he has chosen not to do so.

Dear Loving Heavenly Father, Praise You for Your awesome love that was willing to leave heaven and come to earth (Philippians 2:6-8) to ransom us from sin's punishment and to give us your righteousness (Second Corinthians 5:21). You have the right to send all to hell as a just punishment for all have sinned (Romans 3:23), but You gave up Your rights to punish, and in unspeakable great love, You took our punishment! Your example of unselfish love is our goal to follow. To love and follow you is not just rules to obey, but a heart that shows love by our actions to our brothers and sisters in Messiah. It is clear who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil by this - anyone who does not act righteously or love his brother is not of God (First John 3:10). We love to please You by loving our brothers and sisters. You have done so much for us in love. Thank you for the joy that we can show You our love by loving others. In Yeshua's holy name and power of His resurrection. Amen

Paul now asks another series of rhetorical questions, all of which once again expect a positive answer. These questions begin with (Greek: *me*, which means *they assume a negative answer, but by virtue of a Greek double negative, in essence, these questions turn out to expect a positive answer*). First year Greek students are usually told that there is no such thing as a double negative in Greek - that Greek writers pile up negatives in order to emphasize the negative nuance. However, there is a little-known Greek grammatical rule that when a second negative in a series of negatives is a simple negative (*ou*) rather than a

compound negative (*oude* or *oudeis*), that second negative does in fact function in the same way as a double negative in English. A literal translation of **9:4** would be: It is not the case, is it, that we do not have **the right** to **eat** and **drink**?" The assumed answer is, "Of course not!" Put positively, therefore, we can translate this question, "We have just as much **right** to **eat** and **drink** as anyone else, right?" And the assumed answer is, "Of course I do!"²³²

Don't we [apostles] have the right to be given food and drink (9:4)? That is, "As a **minister of God**, not to mention **an apostle**, don't **I** have **the right** to expect that at least **food and drink** will be provided to **me** (**First Timothy 5:17-18; Galatians 6:6**)? Of course **I** do!"

Don't we have the right to take along with us a believing wife, as do the other apostles, also the Lord's brothers (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) and Kefa (9:5)? "Don't **I** have **the right** to marry a believing **woman** (**Mark 1:29-31**), as were **Yeshua's brothers** - the sons born naturally to Joseph and Mary after **Yeshua**. Eusebius' *History of the Christian Church* (written around 320 AD) quotes Papias (early second century) as authority that **the apostle Philip** was married (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Cy - These are the Names of the Twelve Apostles**). We know **Peter (Kefa)** was married from the fact that **he** had a **mother-in-law** (**Mt 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38**); perhaps **Paul** singles **him** out here from **the other apostles** because **he** had been in **Corinth** with **his wife** or because **he** was the hero of one of **the Corinthian** "fan clubs" (**1:12**). It is ironic that the Roman Catholics regard **Peter** as the first pope, yet **he** was **married**,²³³ and was never in Rome (see the commentary on **Romans Do - People God Uses**). In any case, **Paul** was probably a widower. In any case, though **he** chose to be single, **he** had every **right** to remarry. **He** also had **the right**, as did the other **apostles**, to take **his** believing **wife** with **him** as **he ministered** and to have **her supported** along with **him**.

Then, with a touch of sarcasm, **Paul** asks: **Or are Barnabas and I the only ones required to go on working for our living (9:6)?** **Paul and Barnabas** have as much **right** as the others to get **their** livelihood from the ministry, without having to work on the side. **They** did not pay **their** own way because **they** were obligated to do so. **They** did it voluntarily.²³⁴

An analogy from everyday occupations (9:7): **Paul** had **the right** to receive support from the churches that he founded for his ongoing ministry. **He** makes **his** point through three rhetorical questions; the expected answer to each one being "No!" **Soldiers** who go to war on behalf of **their** country are paid a salary; no **soldier** is expected to be self-supporting. **Have you ever heard of a soldier paying his own expenses?** No! A person who **plants a vineyard** has **the right** to **eat the fruit** of **his** labor. **Have you ever seen a**

farmer planting a vineyard without eating its grapes? No! A person who tends a flock has **the right** to drink the milk of **his flock**. **Who shepherds a flock without drinking some of the milk (9:7)?** No one!²³⁵ All three types of workers are paid for **their** work. It is the customary, **rightful**, and expected thing.

Why should it not be true for **God's** workers as well? It should!



An analogy from Deuteronomy (9:8-11): What I am saying is not based merely on human authority, because the Torah says the same thing - for in the Torah of Moshe it is written, “You are not to put a muzzle on an ox when it is treading out the grain” (Deuteronomy 25:4). Since God is concerned about cattle, all the more he says this for our sakes. Paul interprets this text in a typical rabbinic-type argument called “light and heavy” (Hebrew: *qal wahomer*). If something is true on a lower scale, it is certainly true on a more important, higher scale. In other words, if mere animals are given **the right** to eat as they are working in the fields, certainly human beings made in the image of **God** have the same **right**. In fact, **God** is more concerned about getting across a principle for human beings in this text than **He** is about getting across a principle for animals.²³⁶ **Yes, it was written for us, meaning that he who plows and he who threshes should work expecting to get a share of the crop (9:8-10)?**

An analogy from ministry (9:11-12): Paul follows up the previous argument with a second *qal wahomer* argument. If something is true on a human physical scale (for **farmers**, for example), then it must certainly be true on a **spiritual** scale. If **farmers** can expect to gain their food and support from working in the fields and at **harvest**, certainly **missionaries** should expect the same as **they** gain a **spiritual harvest**. **If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you if others are sharing in this right to be supported by you, don't we have a greater claim to it (9:11).** Since **farmers** have every **right** to expect material support from working in the fields and at **harvest**, certainly **missionaries** should expect the same as **they** gain a **spiritual harvest (Romans 15:26-27).**²³⁷

But, we don't make use of this right. Rather, we put up with all kinds of things so as not to impede in any way the Good News about the Messiah (9:12). How would receiving money have hampered **the gospel**? To whom would it have been a stumbling block? Potential converts may have shied away from receiving **Messiah** as their **Lord and Savior** if they suspected that it came with strings attached: acceptance would cause them to be financially committed to **Paul** on a continuing basis. Therefore, **Paul** sought to avoid any impression that **he** was preaching only for money. Yet, some of **the Corinthians** were actually ashamed of **Paul**. **They** did not interpret **his** voluntary act as conforming to the pattern of **Messiah's** sacrifice: **Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you, through His poverty, might become rich (Second Corinthians 8:9b).** Instead, **they** interpreted **his poverty** as demeaning to **himself** and embarrassing to **them**.

Paul expanded this concept of limiting **his** freedom in **Messiah** a bit when **he** wrote to the church in **Thessalonica**: **We were so devoted to you that we were glad to share with you not only God's Good News but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship, how we worked night and day not to put a burden on any of you while we were proclaiming God's Good News to you (First Thessalonians 2:8-9).** While it would have been perfectly appropriate for **Paul** to receive regular financial support from both of these churches - in **Corinth** and **Thessalonica** - **he** voluntarily laid aside **his rights** and limited **his** freedom in **Messiah** in order to increase the effectiveness of **his** ministry. It was as if **Paul** were saying to the believers in **Corinth**, "If I can lay aside my **right** to receive money from you, surely, you can limit your freedom in **Messiah** and choose not to **eat meat** sacrificed to idols if doing so would cause your weaker brother or sister to violate his or her own conscience and sin."²³⁸

An analogy from the Temple priesthood (9:13): **Paul** added additional weight to **his** argument with one more analogy, but this time it's from **the Torah**. **Don't you know that those who work in the Temple get their food from the Temple, and those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrifices offered there (9:13)?** The priests, who performed **sacred services**, were **supported** by the tithes of crops and animals as well as **sacrifices** from the people to whom **they ministered in the Temple (Numbers 18:8-24).** Hundreds of years before the Aaronic priesthood, in fact, **Abraham** gave tithes to **Melchizedek, a priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18-20).** Since **they worked in the Temple, they** needed to be **supported**.

A teaching from Yeshua Himself (9:14): **Paul** raised the level of authority for **his**

argument another notch from **the Torah** to the command of **Yeshua**. Both **God's Torah** and **God's Son** taught that **His** prophets, teachers and **ministers** were to be paid for **their work in the Lord**. Thus, the teaching in the B'rit Chadashah echoes that of **the Torah**. **In the same way, the Lord directed that those who proclaim the Good News should get their living from the Good News (9:14)**. **Yeshua** taught this principle when **He** said: **Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gv - Jesus Sends Out the Seventy**). **The Lord** commands **His people** to offer **support** to those who **minister** to **them**, but **He** does not command **those** who **minister** to accept **the support**. **Paul** did not. **He** had **the right**, as much as any, and more than most. But for the sake of **the Good News**, for the sake of **his brothers** and **sisters** in **the Lord**, and for the sake of love, **he** gladly and willingly laid aside all **his rights**.²³⁹