

## **Commentary on First Corinthians chapter 9 by Chuck Smith 9.10.23**

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**September memory verse Isaiah 40:8 (NKJV)** The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."

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I could do a lot of things I don't do. The reason why I don't do them is I do not want to be an offense unto a weaker brethren and destroy his relationship with God because of my own liberty in Christ. This is essentially what Paul is saying to the Corinthians. And he is telling them that they should be careful in their exercise of their own freedom in Christ, that they would not use it in such a way as it could be a stumblingblock to a weaker brother.

Now, as Paul is continuing this line of thought and this argument, he gives an example from his own personal life. Being an apostle, he could make many demands as an apostle that he refuses to make, because he doesn't want to cause offense to anyone. So as he is getting into this apostleship now, and his rights as an apostle, he is only showing from his own personal experience how he puts into practice the principal that he has just sought to teach them. And that is: yes, you have liberty, you have the rights, but you don't have to always insist on your rights or exercise your liberty, especially if it hurts someone else.

So, the law that governs me is the law of love, my love for my brethren in Christ, especially those who might be weaker in the faith. My love for them is the law that governs my activities, not whether it is right or wrong. And so Paul said,

Am I not an apostle? am I not free? ([1Cr 9:1](#))

That is, free to do whatever I want as an apostle.

have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are you not my work in the Lord? ([1Cr 9:1](#))

So he is using as a sign of his apostleship, first of all, that he had seen Christ the Lord. One of the requirements of apostleship in the early church was the ability to bear witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ by being an eyewitness of His resurrection.

Now, there are those today within the church who are seeking to claim the authority of apostles, and one of them died the other day. But they do have men who have claimed the authority of apostleship. From a New Testament standpoint, it would be a difficult kind of a claim to make, for one of the requirements was the ability to bear witness of

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the resurrection of Jesus Christ by being an eyewitness. Paul declares that he saw Jesus

He said, If I be not an apostle unto others, doubtless I am to you: for the seal of my apostleship is your being in the Lord ([1Cr 9:2](#)).

My ministry among you, the fruit of the ministry, the proof of my ministry. The fact that you are in the Lord. You are the seal of my apostleship.

Mine answer to them that do examine me in this ([1Cr 9:3](#)):

He is actually saying, "This is my defense to those who would cross-examine me." He is using in the Greek a couple of legal terms. And evidently, the divisions in Corinth led to the place where they said, "Well, we are of Apollos," and they began as they did in many places to challenge Paul's claim as an apostle. Paul said, "I am an apostle, not by the will of man, but by the will of God." But they challenged his claim. They said, "Aw, he says he is an apostle, but he's not really an apostle." So they were challenging his apostleship. And so he said,

My defense to them that would examine me in this issue, is that have I not the power to eat and to drink? Have we not the power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and also of Peter himself? Or I only and Barnabas, have we not the power to forbear working? ([1Cr 9:3-6](#))

We don't have to work. We have the power not to work as an apostle. For those who preach the gospel have every right to live by the gospel. He said,

Who goes a warfare any time at his own expense? ([1Cr 9:7](#))

If you go to war, they provide for you. You don't go out and buy your gun and your boots, and buy your helmet and buy your ammunition. Those things are provided for you if you are in the military. You don't have to buy your own F-15. So Paul said, "Who goes to war and pays his own expenses?"

who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? or who feeds the flock, and doesn't drink the milk? Say I these things as a man? or saith the law also? ([1Cr 9:7-8](#))

Am I just spouting off as a man, or does the Bible confirm this? And using as a scriptural basis for this premise, he said,

For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn. Does God take care for oxen? ([1Cr 9:9](#))

So, that was a part of the law. The ox that treaded down the corn, you weren't to put a muzzle on his mouth. As he was going through pulling the plows and all, he could eat as

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he went through. You weren't to muzzle his mouth, because he is laboring. He is working.

Now he is saying, "Does God take care of oxen? Is He more interested in oxen than He is in men?" So Paul goes to the Old Testament to show that a servant has the right, or the ox has the right to eat the corn that it is treading.

Now did the Lord say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that plows should plow in hope ([1Cr 9:10](#));

That is, the hope of the harvest.

and he that threshes threshes in hope that he might be the partaker of his own labor. If we have sown to you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap from you the carnal things? If others are partakers of this power over you, are not we even more? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ ([1Cr 9:10-12](#)).

Now, again, talking about the liberty to do things, the right to do things. Paul is pointing out that, as an apostle, as being the instrument that God used to minister to these people's spiritual life, having brought to them the Word of God and the things of the Spirit, as an apostle he had every right to be supported by them. He had every right to receive material benefits from them. However, he said, "I did not do it lest I would hinder the gospel of Christ."

Do you not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? ([1Cr 9:13](#))

The priests who offered the sacrifices got a certain portion of the meat. He got a certain portion of the flour and these things that were brought as sacrifices from the people to sacrifice to the Lord. The priests got a share of those things. He lived by these things that were brought in.

Now Paul is saying, "I have every right to receive from you material recompense for my labors among you."

Even [he said] the Lord has ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void ([1Cr 9:14-15](#)).

Now Paul said, "Yes, I have every right, but I am not exercising it. I would rather be dead than to take a penny from you." Why did Paul have this attitude? Because, unfortunately in Paul's day, as it is in the present day, there are many ministers that abuse this right. There are many ministries that are constantly seeking gimmicks, methods, and ways of extracting more money from the people.

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If you ever get on the mailing lists of some of these evangelists, there is no end to their imaginations and the development of gimmicks to try and get you to send in your support for their ministries. You go to a lot of these services and you are exposed to a lot of the gimmickry. "The Lord has revealed to me that there are ten people here tonight that are going to give one thousand dollars for this ministry. The Lord has revealed to me that there are fifty people that are going to give five hundred dollars." That is not so. That is putting it mildly. That is gimmickry. That is deception. That is terrible!

Now, because of this, many people have been turned away from the gospel of Jesus Christ, and they say, "All they want is your money." And unfortunately, that is true in many places. That is the reason why here at Calvary Chapel we never have pledges. That is the reason why here at Calvary Chapel we never make any appeals for the offerings. Nothing more is ever said than, "The ushers will come forward to receive the tithes and the offerings." But it is up to you whether you give or not, and no one will ever ask you to give. That is why that we here at Calvary Chapel love to give to people to just blow the minds of people who say the church is only out to get. That was the same with Paul. He didn't want to be accused of being a mercenary, of just being after the people's money. He didn't want that to be an offense.

You know, years ago when the Lord called me into the ministry I had seen a lot of this begging for Jesus bit. I had seen these various types of offering appeals. In fact, in college I was even taught how to make a strong appeal for money, taught how to develop drives and solicit pledges and things of this nature. But, when the Lord called me to the ministry, I said, "Lord, I will make you a deal. I will serve You in the ministry as long as You provide, but I am never going to solicit my support from people. You take care of me. I am not going to ask people. I am not going to beg people for money. Money will never be an issue in my ministry."

I feel that it is criminal and manifestly wrong for these ministers who are constantly begging people for their dollars. And you know, it is almost as bad as the time in the Roman church when they sold indulgences. "You want to get your prayer answered, send your offering in to us. You've got an unsaved son? Send your offering to us and God will save him. You can buy salvation for your son. You can buy healing for your mother. You can buy all kinds of indulgences." It is made out to be that way in these phony fundraising drives. If those who were soliciting those funds would live very simple lives, not live in a lavish style, then I could accept it. But when these same ones who are begging these poor little widows to sacrifice from their social security checks to send into them, and they themselves are living a very high style of life, I find it intolerable.

Paul the apostle, I think I really identify and love this guy, because he had much the same attitude that I have as far as money is concerned. He said, "I don't want your money. I won't take your money. I glory in the fact that I was able to provide for myself and the needs of my party while I was there and we didn't take anything from you. And I would rather be dead than to lose this bit of glorying that I had that I did not take money from you, though as an apostle I had every right. God has ordained that those that

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minister the gospel should live of the gospel. That is right. The ox is not to be muzzled. God, if He takes care of the ox, surely takes care of His servants that are out preaching His Word. The priests live by the things of the altar. I had every right to, but yet I didn't, because I didn't want to be an offense. I didn't want to stumble somebody to think that I was trying to enrich myself through the preaching of the gospel."

I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me ([1Cr 9:15](#)):

I am not trying to make an appeal now, Paul said. That is not the purpose for my saying these things.

for it were better that I be dead, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me, if I preach not the gospel! ([1Cr 9:15-16](#))

I am not preaching it for the glory or for the money. There is a necessity laid on me. There is a burden on my heart. Woe is me, if I don't preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For if I do this thing willingly, then I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me ([1Cr 9:17](#)).

Paul said, "I am doing this willingly. Thus, I have my reward, because I am doing it willing for the Lord."

What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel ([1Cr 9:18](#)).

Paul said,

For though I am really free from all men ([1Cr 9:19](#)),

I don't owe you anything and I haven't taken anything from you, so I am free of all men.

yet have I made myself the servant unto all, that I might gain the more ([1Cr 9:19](#)).

I am really free from you, but I made myself a servant that I might gain more.

unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as also without law, (not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I by all means might save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you ([1Cr 9:20-23](#)).

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So Paul is seeking to identify with people. He is not setting himself above people and preaching down to people, but coming down on their level and seeking to understand where they are, seeking to identify with them in such a way that they could identify with Paul so that he could lead them to the strength and the power that they might know through Jesus Christ.

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run, that ye may obtain ([1Cr 9:24](#)).

And so, again, Paul sees the Christian life as a race. He said to Timothy, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course" ([II Timothy 4:7](#)). The idea of the race. If Paul was the author of Hebrews, and I personally feel he was, he also made reference to the race. "Wherefore laying aside every weight and sin which doth so easily beset us, let us run the race with patience looking unto Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith" ([Hebrews 12:1-2](#)).

Now, life is as a race, but Paul says, "Run to win." I like that. I have enough competitive spirit in me that I don't play to lose. Whenever I go out in any sport, I go out to win. That is almost a fault. It has been a real fault in my life. My desire to win is so great that if there is any place I can lose my composure it is when there has been a bad call. I am out to win. And Paul said to be that way in your life for Christ. Go all out. So run that you might obtain the prize.

And every man that strives for the mastery ([1Cr 9:25](#))

That is a term for the wrestling. The Olympics were held in Athens, but they had also the second largest athletic events in the world were held in Corinth. And so those in Corinth were very familiar with the athletes who would be training for the games of Corinth. A fellow who is working out in wrestling,

is temperate in all things ([1Cr 9:25](#)).

That is, he lives a very disciplined life as he is getting his body into shape.

They are doing it for a corruptible crown ([1Cr 9:25](#));

They are putting their bodies through torturous exercises in order that they might develop their athletic skills. They are watching their diet. They are living very careful, disciplined lives in order that they might win their event so that the judges may put a little laurel wreath on their head--a laurel wreath that will soon dry out, a corruptible crown.

Now, if they are willing to put in so much time, so much energy, so much effort, so much discipline to receive a gold medal, how much more effort should we be putting in to gain the incorruptible crown of glory that God has promised to His faithful servants. Run to win. And as Paul said, "I run that way."

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I therefore so run [I run to win], not as uncertainly ([1Cr 9:26](#));

That is, not just careless... "Well, I hope I finish. Doesn't matter." No sir, I'm running with the intention of winning.

so fight I, not as one who is beating the air ([1Cr 9:26](#)):

Not as a shadow boxer.

But I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection ([1Cr 9:27](#)):

"I discipline," Paul said, "my own body, keeping it into subjection."

lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disapproved ([1Cr 9:27](#)).

Now, Paul talks about the discipline, keeping his body under. Man is a threefold being: body, mind, and spirit. The natural man is body, mind, and spirit. When a person is born again, he is inverted and he becomes spirit, mind, and body. The natural man, body, mind, and spirit; the mind is under the control of the body, which is uppermost. So the unregenerate man, the sinner, is a man who is aware and conscious of the body and the body needs and the body appetites, and that is all he thinks about. And all you have to do is open up your ears in the public and you hear what people talk about. What are they talking about? Their fleshly experiences. The gal they had last weekend. Some new bar that has opened up, some disco, fleshly body experiences. That is their mind. That is where their minds run in that area.

When a person is born again by the Spirit and he becomes spirit, mind, and body, then the mind is under the control of the Spirit and he is thinking about spiritual things, how he may please God. He is thinking about the Word of God. He is thinking about his walk with Jesus Christ. He is thinking about the Lord. He is singing about the Lord. His mind is on the things of the Spirit.

Now, the Bible tells us that the persons whose minds are upon the things of the flesh is dead, but the person whose mind is upon the things of the Spirit is alive, and he has peace and he has joy.

Now, when I am born again and I am now spirit, soul, and body, my body down here doesn't like it in the basement. My body enjoyed sitting on the throne. It enjoyed ruling over me. It enjoyed its tyranny that it had over me, and it doesn't like being underneath. And thus, my body is constantly trying to rise. I am not dead to the desires of my flesh. They are there. They are always there as long as I am living in this body. But my desires for the Lord and the things of the Lord are greater than my desires for the flesh. But I find that I have to keep my body under, for my body would love to come and begin to rule again and put the spirit under. So Paul said, "I discipline myself to keep the body under, not giving over to the things of my flesh, lest even in this area of having



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ministered to others I myself would be disapproved." And there are those who say that Paul is here talking about his service to God put on the shelf so to speak.

So, it is important for us to keep the body under, to discipline ourselves in spiritual disciplines. If the athletes are willing to go through such discipline just to receive a corruptible crown, how much more should we discipline ourselves for the incorruptible crown of life that the Lord our righteous judge shall give to us and to all those who love His appearing.

Paul tells us that the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. These are contrary. I am in a battle within, and I must discipline myself to keep the body under.