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1 Corinthians 9

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

1 Corinthians 9.

Topics.

- Do apostles not have the right to take along a believing wife?
- Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?
- Paul would rather die than be deprived of his ground for boasting.
- Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!
- Paul has become all things to all people.
- In a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize?

The previous chapter: in the previous chapter Paul spoke about entering idol temples and eating food offered to an idol, people who do not know as they ought to know, brother and sisters with a spiritually strong conscience and others with a spiritually weak conscience, he stated that if those with a spiritually strong conscience wound another brother or sisters weak conscience they are sinning against Christ.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

- In certain chapters this letter is written as though Paul is having a conversation with the Corinthians (i.e., he asks them a question and then answers it etc.).
- Though Paul's letter is directed to the Corinthian church the content applies to any church or believer in the same situations.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-5

Do not Apostles have the Right to take Along a Believing Wife.

- **1 Corinthians 9:1-5:** Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? ²If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. ³This is my defence to those who would examine me. ⁴Do we not have the right to eat and drink? ⁵Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

It appears some have questioned Paul's apostleship, which is the reason he is defending himself, those with him and his ministry, he tells his accusers that he is free to eat, meaning he is free to eat all kinds of foods contrasted to the Jews who could only eat foods that were considered clean under the Levitical law and that he is free to drink. This freedom to drink obviously does not refer to water since without water Paul would die, so the implication is that he is free to drink wine (in moderation) which under the Levitical law priests were forbidden to do and though Paul was a single man he tells those accusing him that had the right to take a believing wife with him while travelling and ministering for the Lord as do as all others in the ministry. To add to his defence, he tells them that he has seen the Lord, referring to his experience on the road to Damascus and that the Corinthian brothers and sisters are evidence of his apostleship since it was Paul who established the church.

NOTE: though drinking alcohol is not a sin the Bible in many verses clearly warns against excess drinking and drunkenness for obvious reasons, i.e., people heavily influenced by alcohol do things they wouldn't normally do and which they may regret the next day and even worse for a lifetime,

but a man and woman sharing a glass of wine over a romantic dinner or a man having a glass of beer after a day's work on a hot summers day is certainly not committing any sin.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15

Who serves as a Soldier at his own Expense?

- **1 Corinthians 9:6-15:** Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? ⁷Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? ⁸Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? ⁹For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. ¹¹If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? ¹²If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. ¹³Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? ¹⁴In the same way the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. ¹⁵But I have made no use of any of these rights nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting.

Boasting: (Glorying in KJV) can be good or bad, in a bad sense it carries the idea of glorying and rejoicing in self and in a good sense it carries the idea of glorying and rejoicing in God.

Paul points out to his accusers, no soldier goes to war at his own expense, everyone who plants a vineyard eats of its fruit and those who shepherd a flock drink their milk added to this even the law of Moses says:

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- You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain" (Deut. 25:4)

This means do not to stop the ox from eating the gain while it is working. Paul is making the point, if God is concerned about oxen being fed while working how much more does, He care about those who are doing His work and reminds them that those who minister in the temple eat the sacrificial offerings. Paul says all this to show his accusers that in the same manner that the soldier, the one who plants a vineyard, the shepherd, the ox, those who minister in the temple are all supported by the work they do Christ has commanded that in the same way those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living (v14) meaning those that work in providing spiritual food and those that work in providing natural food should be sharing each-others food. Paul is pointing out to his accusers that it is right that those serving the Lord should be supported by those who are being fed the spiritual food nevertheless Paul and those ministering with him chose not to be supported by others for the following three reasons:

1. Not to place a burden on those they were ministering to.
2. So, they would not hinder anyone for accepting the Gospel.
3. So that he would not be obligated to anyone and therefore were free to proclaim the full Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul would rather die than be deprive of his ground for boasting:

Paul's words, "I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting (meaning glorying and rejoicing) (v15) refers to the fact that he is not placing any burden for his living expenses on those he is ministering to by expecting them to support him, this is why he can glory in his preaching, because he is doing it out of his own will and not for wages. Paul is doing this so that he does not put any form of obstacle, hindrance or difficulty in the way of the Gospel of Christ (v12).

NOTICE: it is not his proclaiming the Gospel that he is boasting about, but the fact he is able to do it free of charge, we know this because in the following verse he explains to the Corinthians that he cannot boast in the fact he is preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says that "He will not make full use of his right to be supported by others" (v18) the KJV states it this way, "Paul will not abuse his power in the Gospel" referring to being supported by others. Though it is the right for those serving the Lord to be supported by those they minister to, this does not mean they have the right to live in the laps of luxury, own excessively expensive homes, drive the top of the range cars and wear designer clothing since it is the money of hard working families many struggling themselves that are supporting them.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:16-18

Woe to me if I do not Preach the Gospel!

- **1 Corinthians 9:16-18:** For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. ¹⁸What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

Necessity: means compelled, compulsion, forced, distress, constraint it carries the idea of having needs that must be met.

Paul is saying that just because he preaches the Gospel it gives him no grounds for boasting, since Christ laid upon him a sense of obligation and compulsion to proclaim it. Paul here is no-doubt referring to that moment Ananias told him that Jesus in a vision had told him to go and tell Paul that:

- He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry his name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel (Acts 9:3-15)

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Therefore, if he does it willingly from his own will he will have a reward, but even if he does not want to do it Christ has entrusted him with preaching it, thus the reason Paul's states:

- Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (v16).

The Lord had not only entrusted Paul to this stewardship but gifted him with revelations and miraculous abilities which meant whether he wanted to minister or not he was compelled to proclaim the Gospel. The words, "Woe to me" embrace the following two aspects:

1. The grief Paul might face at his loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ if he did not proclaim Christ's name.
2. To Paul's great sorrow if he could not preach the Gospel.

This is the reason Paul says that his great reward is the fact that he can support himself without having to be dependent on others and therefore because of their support be subject to them at some level which means he is free to preach the full Gospel without being influenced by others.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23

Paul has become all things to all People.

- **1 Corinthians 9:19-23:** For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one

outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Paul's statement "I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some" (v22) does not mean we become sinners to save some sinners, rather it means Paul respected peoples lawful culture, traditions and customs etc., i.e., things that are not against the law of God and that he was sensitive to their conscience and position in life. It means that he became a partaker of the Jewish peoples customs and their traditions and to those Jews who were zealous for the law of Moses and held strictly to it he submitted himself to their customs and acted according to their Law (though not subject to it himself) so as not to offend and in so doing be received by them in the hope he would be able to proclaim Christ. To those outside the law referring to the Gentiles and the weak in conscience, in poverty or in health he accepted within the law of God and under the law of Christ which means he accepted them in love, mercy and grace i.e., he accepted people as Christ accepted them and he did this all for the sake of the Gospel that he might be able to win some of them to the Lord and share with them in its blessings.

NOTE: it is not wrong or against God or grace to keep a lawful custom or cultural or religious tradition or practise for the purpose of appeasing the anger of those opposed to Christ or for the purpose of sharing the Gospel.

Paul's motivation, ministry and wages: everything Paul did he did for the benefit of the Gospel and the benefit of others and the reason he considered it a reward that he did not receive wages for preaching the Gospel was because it meant he was not bound to anyone and therefore he was free to preach the full Gospel and not just what people wanted to hear this is one of the reasons why he considers not receiving wages a reward.

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1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

In a Race all the Runners Compete, but only One Receives the Prize?

- **1 Corinthians 9:24-27:** Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So, run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The words, "All the runners compete, but only one receives the prize?" Does not mean that when Christ returns there will be one person exalted above all other brothers and sisters in Christ, rather this is about attitude. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians brothers and sisters to live a lifestyle in Christ with the same attitude an athlete has when they are competing in a race, i.e., with the determination to endure to the finish and win the prize regardless of hardship and troubles.

The wonder, beauty and majesty of the Bible: scholars have worked out that the Roman Olympic games would have been on when Paul was writing this letter, the beauty of this is that the wreath (crown) the winner received was made of perishable leaves, in these verses Paul is contrasting this perishable crown of leaves with the imperishable crown those who abide and endure in Christ will receive when he returns (the finish line of the race). Paul is encouraging the Corinthian brothers and sisters to see the finishing line which is Christ and run toward him.

Paul was very aware of the passions of the flesh: Paul's words, "I discipline my body and keep it under control" show that he had the same sinful aberrations and dysfunctions within his own fallen and corrupted

nature as we all do, but he does not allow them to control his life. It is not the passions of the flesh i.e., selfishness, ego, pride, greed and lust etc., that destroy those in Christ, even Paul had to contend with troubling desires of the body, rather it is when we act on them and allow them to lead us away from our faith in the Lord and thereby be disqualified from eternal salvation. Paul uses himself to indirectly warn the Corinthian brothers and sisters not to follow the passions of the flesh, because a sinful lifestyle has the potential to lead those in Christ away from the Lord and ultimately to denying him.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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