

First Corinthians

March 30, 2025

Chapter 9

The Matters of Apostleship

“Paul’s Proof of His Apostleship”

Part 2 - Chapter 9:1-12

c) His Right to Authority (9:12)

Verse 12.

“If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.”

When Paul asks, “If others share the right over you, do we not more,” what is he really asking? Is Paul fishing to see if the Church is supporting other ministries financially? Did he hear something about this from Chloe? Everything else Paul has addressed thus far came from her, so why not this? He had every right to because he was the planter of the Church (3:6). In his following letter to the Church, Paul will say,

“or did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other Churches by taking wages from them to serve you, and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brothers came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything, I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.” (2 Corinthians 11:7-9)

Paul’s statement indicates that the Corinth Church never supported him because he would never allow it. There had to be some reason for this, and it had to do with the hindrance of the Gospel because of something happening in the Church.

At this point, Paul and his team have not asserted the right to take a salary from the Corinth Church. Why? Paul says they took nothing to further the “gospel of Christ” and not hinder it. Why was this Paul’s decision?

The clue is this. Paul must suffer hardship, not taking a salary from the Corinth Church because he knows it will be used against him when he arrives to straighten out all things not corrected by the time he arrives. With the harsh words that Paul fears he will have to say, the Church will not be able to say, “We pay your salary; how dare you speak to us like that.” It is not new that ministers meet resistance and harsh aggression when members are righteously chastised. Not to get too far ahead in the storyline, Paul will say in Chapter 11:18, “For, in the first place, when you come together as a Church, I hear that divisions exist among you, and in part I believe it.” In Chapter 2:21, Paul said, “Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?” The Church in Corinth has so many issues that Paul, as he writes this letter, does not know what he will find when he arrives. Therefore, he would rather suffer and serve without pay to do what he needs to do to straighten out the Church for the cause of the Gospel of Christ without any hindrances caused by his wanting the Church to support his livelihood and his team.

It is now time for Paul to assert his right to obtain.

d) His Right to Obtain (9:13-14)

As a dispenser of sacred services, Paul says,

¹³ Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? ¹⁴ So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

In these verses, Paul refers back to the Old Testament instructions of the LORD, where He provided for the living of the Tabernacle and Temple priests through the tithes and offerings given by the people. Priests were prohibited from owning anything and were to be supported solely by these gifts. Similarly, with the establishment of the Church and this guidance from the Apostle Paul, ministers of the Gospel were to have their livelihood supported by the same source: the gifts to the Church.

When someone asks why the Church asks for tithes and offerings, the answer is this: Part of that money provides the living expenses of the Gospel ministers and their families.

3. Paul's Bond-ship of Apostleship (9:19)

Paul returns to speak of his liberty in Christ in his freedom. Paul says,

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more."

Paul was not a slave to anyone. At this point in his life, he was indeed a free man in every respect. Yet, Paul decided to become a slave to all men in his service as an Apostle. Here, we have Paul's thoughts, which he will express in his following letter to Corinth. He says in 2 Corinthians 4:5, *"For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as LORD, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake."*

What is a bond-servant? A bond-servant is a voluntary position in which a person chooses to serve another for life without any guaranteed pay. In the Old Testament, when a Jew rescued another Jew who was captured and put in the Gentile slave market, the rescued Jew would work off the cost of his redemption from the Gentile slave market by working for the redeemer. Regardless of the amount paid at the market, the redeemed one was only required to work up to six years or until the next Sabbatical year. However, when the man repaid the redeemer, he was free and could leave the redeemer's homestead. The LORD made arrangements in the Law that a free man could remain permanently in the service of his redeemer with only the promise of his livelihood for him and his family. (See Exodus 21). The arrangement with the redeemer after the debt puts the redeemed in the position of a bond-slave. It is when a person volunteers to remain in the service of the one who redeemed him for life. This is what Paul did. He was redeemed on the road to Damascus and chosen to be an Apostle; then Paul accepted the Apostleship of his Redeemer and volunteered to serve his Redeemer for life at no charge.

Why has Paul chosen to serve the LORD as a servant to all men? It is to win more. Winning more what? Winning more souls for the LORD. It is to do what the Apostles do. They share the Gospel, tell the rest of the story of God's plan so it can be written down for the entire Church of the future to know, evangelize the sinners, tend to the needs of the Church members, and train the saints in the LORD's teachings. It is the Great Commission given by the LORD (Matthew 28:19-20). As a bond-servant of Jesus, Paul would win by making, baptizing, and teaching more saints for the cause of Jesus.

That said, Paul will now identify who he seeks to win to Christ as a bond servant. Here is Paul's plan to win souls. It is a great example that everyone should follow in making disciples. First, he will minister to the Jews with the Law.

a) To the Jews with the Law (9:20)

Paul says,

²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;

At first reading, this long sentence seems very convoluted with “*became as a Jew ... win Jews ... under the Law ... not under the Law ... win those who are under the Law.*” Which is it? What is Paul saying? Actually, for those who know the Bible story and the redeeming work of Jesus, this is extremely easy to understand. We will break it down.

“*To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews....*” Paul was a Jew by birth. He was a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin. He did not have to become a Jew because he was a Jew. Every person who was a descendant of the twelve sons of Jacob is a Jew. But what does Paul mean by his words here? Why does he need to become a Jew when he is already a Jew?

When the LORD selected Jacob and his descendants to be his elect biological family, the LORD gave them instructions for Jewish life at Mount Sinai. Those instructions are recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. I like to call those books “The Drivers Training Handbook for All Jewish Life.” If you do not know what is in those books, it is difficult to truly understand all the rest of God’s Word because everything the Jews do in the Bible is guided by the rules and regulations in those four books. The fastest way to get to the LORD’s intent in any passage dealing with Jews is to cast it in light of the instructions in those four books.

The LORD laid out His sacrificial and moral Laws for Jewish life in the four books. But He also told us that one day, He would come to earth as the Savior of the people and become the full and final sacrifice for sin. He would fulfill the sacrificial Law and bring it to an end with His death on the cross. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said,

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”

With Jesus’ death on the cross, He *filled up the Law*, making it complete. His death was the last sacrifice needed to fulfill the Law. With His death, the sacrificial requirements came to an end. However, the original Law for the Jews also included the moral Laws. Jesus did not change one word in the moral Laws. They are still in full force.

But with the fulfillment of the sacrificial Laws, every Jew who believes in the LORD Jesus is no longer under the original part of the sacrificial system. Actually, with the death of Jesus, all Jews were no longer under the original part of the sacrificial system because Jesus was the last and final sacrifice needed for sin. However, when Paul was writing this letter, the Jews were still sacrificing at the Temple in Jerusalem. That would not end for another thirteen years. At the time of this letter, Jews who were in rebellion against Jesus were still worshiping according to the Old Testament Laws without any consideration for what Jesus did on the cross to fulfill the Law.

Paul, as a saved saint, with his belief in the LORD as his Savior, was still a Jew, but he was no longer under the Old Testament sacrificial Law. That is why he said, “*as under the Law though not being myself under the Law.*” Let me explain.

Jews who were still part of the Jewish system of sacrificial worship were still practicing the partial sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Paul, a Jew, had accepted Jesus as his Savior, thus ending his need to practice the partial sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Jews who were still practicing Jews were under the Old Testament Laws; Jews who had accepted Jesus were no longer under the Old Testament sacrificial Laws. To witness to Jews who had rejected Jesus and were still practicing the Old Testament Laws, Paul voluntarily went to the Synagogues every Saturday.

He participated in their worship and teaching times. Thus, Paul has continued to be involved in the lives of unsaved Jews to win them to the LORD. This is why Paul says, *“To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews.”* That is all Paul means by that statement. By the way, in almost every town where Paul and his team stopped to minister, you will see Paul entering the synagogues on Saturday to worship and speak when allowed during the teaching time. Therefore, to the unsaved Jews, when Paul came to the synagogues, knowing the practice in the synagogues, the lost Jews would think he was just one of them, a practicing Jew. In most commentaries, the authors will say that Paul never entirely gave up his Jewish roots when he became a Christian. However, they never tell you that his remaining in his Jewish roots was part of his evangelistic plan to win Jews to the LORD. Paul has all the knowledge to go into the synagogues and reason with the Jews to win them to the LORD. Why would he abandon one of his greatest strengths that prepared him to win the lost Jews to Jesus?

When Paul says, *“to those who are under the Law,”* he is pointing his finger at the bloodline Jews, not the Gentiles. Anytime in any of Paul’s letters, when he uses the word “Law,” it is permanently attached to a Jew in some way. Only Jews were attached to and under the Law. No Gentile was attached to the “Law.” Shortly, Paul will arrive in Corinth and write his letter to the Romans. In the Roman letter, Paul speaks to the saved Jews first, starting in Chapter 2, and his message runs to Chapter 11. In Chapter 11, Paul then speaks to the Gentiles. How do we know this? Isn’t Paul’s Roman letter to all Christians? Yes and no. To put the all-important doctrine in the Roman letter to all Christians, he had to straighten out the doctrine of the Jews before he gave doctrinal instructions to the Gentiles. He will end Romans by speaking to the Jews and Gentiles together. To know who Paul is talking to in Romans, he uses words that only apply to Jews: *“Law and brethren.”* Gentiles were never under the Old Testament Law, only the Jews. *“Brethren”* always refers to kin of Jewish blood. Paul uses the word *“brothers”* when referring to all non-Jewish blood people in the Church. In this letter to Corinth, we see Paul’s plan for winning his Jewish kin to the LORD. He will be consistent with his wording concerning Jews in all his letters. It is his plan of evangelism. He will continue to enter the doors and lives of lost Jews as a Jew, addressing the Jews under the Law so he can lead them to Jesus, the fulfillment of the sacrificial Law. It seems that Paul knew winning Jews was much more complicated than winning Gentiles. In the book of Acts, every time Paul speaks with Jews in public, especially in the synagogues on the Sabbath, he has to present the whole Jewish Law sacrificial system before he presents the final sacrifice of Jesus. This evangelistic hurdle was not present when presenting the Gospel to Gentiles.

Does this plan work? Yes, it does. For over twenty years, I had a delightful Jewish friend. He never stepped inside a synagogue. He was Jewish in blood but not really in faith. He used the Jewish blood excuse when I spoke with him. He would not come to my Church because he was Jewish. It was an excuse. One day, as we were on our three-times-a-week twenty-five-mile bike ride, I asked him, “If I go to synagogue with you, will you go to Church with me?” He said, “Not right now.” Come to find out, the synagogues in our area require you to present your tax forms and be current with a 5% tithe to that synagogue before you can be a welcomed attender as a Jew. Now, visitors are welcome anytime.

He did not want to go because he did not want to pay. When a death happened in his family, the synagogue would not do the funeral of the Jew because neither my friend nor his loved one was paid up. So, my friend asked me to do the funeral. I did. I was the only non-Jew there. It went well. Many months after that, as I continued to ask, he finally agreed, but we would have to go to

a different synagogue where they would not know he was a Jew. We would attend as guests. As promised, he came with me to my Church. It was not long before the LORD touched his heart, and the LORD won him. Paul's evangelistic plan still works. Every saved Jew should use it to win their "brethren" to the LORD, even today.

Paul will tell the Gentiles about his evangelistic strategy without the Law.

b) To the Gentiles Without the Law (9:21)

Paul writes,

²¹ to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.

"... to those who are without law, as without law," is Paul's way of telling us he is now addressing non-Jews. He is addressing all the Gentiles in the world who are not under the Law of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Because lost Gentiles are not under the Law and think they have no law, Paul must appeal to them with the Gospel differently. How? The clue to that answer is found in Paul's following statement.

"... though not being without the law of God...." What does Paul mean by this? He does not take the time to explain it here, but he will in his letter to the Romans. Here is what Paul says concerning the "law of God," which the Gentiles are under. In Romans 1:18-23, Paul says,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Do you see where Paul says, "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." What is Paul saying here? Let me explain.

When Adam and Eve were created, the LORD gave one Law. "Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." As we all know, they did not obey. But before they ate, the two were completely innocent. They did not know anything about good, and they did not know anything about evil. But upon eating from the tree, they immediately knew everything about good and everything about evil. That is why it is called the knowledge of the tree of good and evil. At that point, Adam and Eve, and all their descendants, which includes you and me, have within us the knowledge of all that is good and all that is evil about "the law of God." How do we know? Paul said, "because that which is known about God is evident within them." God placed it in them and in all of us when we were born. That is why Paul can say, "so that they are without excuse." In Chapter 2:1 of Romans, in the same context, Paul points his pen in the face of the Jews and Gentiles alike and says, "Therefore, you have no excuse."

The Gentiles, who were not under the Old Testament Jewish laws, had no excuse for their rebellion because, at their birth, they had the LORD's law of good and evil within them. But because they did not have the burden of the Old Testament Jewish Law upon the Gentiles, they fell under the "law of Christ." What is that? That all who call upon the LORD's name will be saved.

That is Paul's plan to evangelize the Gentiles. Does it work? You know it does. Anyone who does not come out of a Jewish religious background, who is a saint in the Church, knows it works.

Now, Paul will speak to the weak for the Gospel cause.

c) **To the Weak for the Gospel (9:22)**

Paul writes,

²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

What Paul means by this is simple. If he has to walk with a Jew in Jewish religious circles to win the Jews, he will walk in those circles. If Paul has to walk in the Gentile circles to win Gentiles, he will walk in those circles. If he has to walk with the strong to win the strong, he will walk with them. If he has to walk with the weak, he will walk with them to win them to the LORD. All people need the LORD.

Why is Paul willing to do this? It is for the sake of the Gospel. It is how the metaphorical race of the evangelism of the Gospel must be run to win.

(1) **For the Sake of the Gospel (9:23-27)**

(a) **To Run to Win (9:23-25a)**

Paul admits,

²³ I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. ²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things.

When Paul says, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel," he tells us that his life and Apostleship are for one purpose: to share the Gospel with everyone he meets. When he says, "so that I may become a fellow partaker of it," he tells us that it is his assignment from the LORD and duty to share the Gospel with everyone he meets.

Paul then uses the example of running a race. At the starting line, everyone intends to win the race. They all know only one will win, but still, they plan to be the winner. Those two points set up the racing story for the next all-important point Paul makes. "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things." To win the race, the participant must have a plan. It must be a winning plan. The plan must be followed precisely with no deviations. Not all have winning plans, but Paul does in the race of evangelism to win souls. He had a plan to evangelize Jews that won, and he could not deviate from it. He has a plan to evangelize Gentiles, which wins, and cannot deviate from it. He plans to evangelize the strong and weak, which wins, and he cannot deviate from it. Each of his plans is to share the Gospel and win the lost to Jesus.

Paul will now compare the difference between running a race down at the local Colosseum and the evangelism Gospel race. One is to win the perishable; the other is to win the imperishable.

(b) **To Win the Imperishable (9:25b-27)**

Paul writes,

They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

The difference between running a worldly race and a worldly purpose is that it is for a reward that will not last. It will perish. Thousands of people have had their names recorded in the race records down through the centuries. Very few are remembered today. The glory of their victory has long since faded away except for the ink on the page of the history books that are seldom

opened and the pages turned. That is not the way it is with the evangelism of the Gospel race. Those names are forever recorded in the eternal books in heaven. Those names receive a reward that cannot be destroyed and cannot perish. Paul uses the word “*we*” in this passage. He is not talking about what he is doing by himself but what all saints must do to win the lost. Winning the lost must be a planned race. It must be headed at the right goal, the finish line of salvation. In a boxing match, you cannot win if you box the air around you. You must hit your target. You must prepare personally to participate in the evangelism of the Gospel race. If you are not ready, you cannot complete the race, leading others to the LORD at the finish line. If you are not prepared, the LORD will not use you.

You will be disqualified. Being disqualified is like being fired from a job. Something was wrong. Something was amiss. Something was not up to par. For some reason, you could not get over the finish line. For the preacher, if there are no salvations after the preaching, that preacher, who does not prepare properly for the preaching of the Gospel race, will be in jeopardy of being disqualified by the LORD. It does not mean he will lose his salvation. The LORD will not take that away, but it may mean he will lose his place of service to the LORD. Is that the end of a person’s favor of the LORD? It all depends. If a man removes a preacher, is he disqualified? It all depends.

God uses men to lead his servants where he wants them to be. If the LORD wants a preacher disqualified, the termination of a ministry position will end his ministry. If the LORD seeks to protect the ministry from the congregation, the LORD will let the congregation terminate that ministry, but the LORD will place that minister in a new and growing ministry. Man may terminate, but God is the final decision-maker in disqualification. The LORD has disqualified many wayward, unprepared ministers, and He used man to terminate them. But, then, there are those ministers terminated by a man, who the LORD will continue to bless in His ministry beyond all measure and comprehension. Here, Paul wants to be approved by the LORD in his ministry, his preparation, and how he runs the race so the LORD will never disqualify him.

Paul is not done with this storyline. In Chapter 10, he continues by explaining that his ministry is for the sake of his Jewish ancestors.