

## Prayers

### To God

When You created the World, Heavenly Father, You fashioned the laws which hold the Universe together and You moulded the life of humanity in Your image. Make us aware of our dependency both on You and also on the created world in which we live, so that we might be good stewards of all creation as we were meant to be, and so we might find ourselves, ultimately, in You who made us and loves us. We ask this through Jesus Christ; AMEN

### For myself

*Theme - 'standing tall'*

Ask the Lord for the strength to do what is right this day. You know what is required of you, so ask Him to keep you 'up to the mark' in everything you do.

### For others

Pray about the dreadful situation in Syria and the talk of precipitative action to force the conflict to a conclusion. Pray now for the leaders of nations!

## Meditation

*Don't stand back:*

Don't let others forever do for you  
what Your Lord would have you do,  
Then you will grow in confidence  
And become His trusted servant.

Don't let your feelings be swayed about,  
dare to take the hand of Christ,  
And draw the pure energy of His love  
which builds your strength and courage.

Don't let the tempter catch you blind  
keep alert, keep constant watch,  
Then take control of every thought,  
so the tempter cannot take you back.

Don't let the world become your idol  
deny its slavish selfish means,  
Be free to choose truth's ancient pathway  
And live by all the Words of God.

# Bible Passage

## 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

<sup>1</sup> Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work done in the Lord? <sup>2</sup> If I am not an apostle to others, then surely I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

<sup>3</sup> This is my defence to those who would sit in judgment over me; <sup>4</sup> Do we not have the right to our food and drink? <sup>5</sup> Do we not have the right to travel with a wife who is a believer, as do the other apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? <sup>6</sup> Or is it only Barnabas and I who must work for a living? <sup>7</sup> Whoever pays his own wages to serve in battle? Whoever fails to eat the fruit of a vineyard he has planted, or drink the milk of the flock he has shepherded?

<sup>8</sup> Do I say these things as a mere man? Does the law not say the same? <sup>9</sup> It is written in the Law of Moses, '*Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading grain*' Now is God concerned for the ox? <sup>10</sup> Does He not really speak for our sake? It was written for our sakes, so that the one who ploughs should plough in hope, and the one who threshes, in hope of receiving a share. <sup>11</sup> If we have sown spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap the material benefits from you? <sup>12</sup> If others share this just claim on you, how much more should we?

However, we did not make use of this claim, and instead endured everything lest we place any obstacle in the way of the Gospel of Christ. <sup>13</sup> Do you not know that those who work in temple service get what they eat from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? <sup>14</sup> In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel.

## Review

1 Corinthians 9 is a longish chapter, but it should really be read as a whole. It is Paul's vigorous defence of his apostleship and his right to engage with the church over its moral, ethic and religious practices. Throughout his letter, Paul takes up one issue after another; sexual immorality (ch.5), lawsuits (ch.6), relationships and marriage (ch.7), and food offered to idols (ch.8), and now he argues with the church over their complaints against him, most specifically, that he is not a real apostle and should not therefore receive any financial help from them.

I have split the chapter in two for our ease of use. Paul begins by claiming his apostleship boldly (9:1-2), and he strongly defends his rights in comparison to other apostles (9:3-7). In order to justify his position, he discusses the Biblical basis for the rights and provision given to those who do the Lord's work (9:8-10) specifically in relation to his founding of the church (9:11,12). He then explains why he did not claim his rights when founding the church, and reveals the theological principles behind what he says (9:12-14). We will look at each paragraph in turn.

### ***Is Paul an apostle? (9:1,2)***

In most of his letters, Paul had to deal with those who said he was not an apostle because he was not one of Jesus' disciples. His opponents said that one who claimed this lofty role must have 'seen the Lord' while on earth, so Paul fails the test. Paul is upset about this and says bluntly, '*I have seen the Lord*' (9:1). Yet how can he say this both here and in many of his letters (e.g. Eph 3:3)? There is certainly no evidence that Paul met Jesus while he was alive. Nevertheless, Paul claims instead that he has had a special and personal experience of Jesus. He describes this in his letter to the Galatians (Galatians 1:12), and it seems he may have believed his conversion 'vision' of Jesus on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:4) was sufficient for him to claim he had '*seen the Lord*'; for it was then that Jesus gave him his commission to preach to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15f.).

A stronger argument for his apostleship may be what Paul says next, which is that any claim for apostleship should be evaluated by 'its fruits' (9:7 - see also Rom 8:23, Gal 5:22, Col 1:6). He calls on his readers to accept that his work in founding the Corinthian church proves that he is an apostle; '*are you not my work done in the Lord? ... you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord*' (9:1,2). The record of Paul's work there is found in Acts 18, which also reveals the while he stayed there he made a living as a 'tentmaker; this is a fact recorded

perhaps to help him make the very points he makes here about the proper support of pioneer missionary work and the priority of the Gospel (9:12, and Acts 18:3).

### ***What are the essential rights of apostles commissioned to the Lord's work? (9:3-7)***

Everything Paul did was a source of contention for his opponents. Some believed that a true apostle should work full time for the Lord, and they believed that an apostle should be paid for by the church and under the commission and direction of the church. They perceived no evidence of this in Paul, and therefore questioned his lifestyle, why, he had plied a trade while in Corinth! Paul is very defensive about this and says, *'to those who sit in judgement over me, do we not have a right to food and drink? ...'* (9:4). As far as he is concerned, his call as an evangelist placed him on a par with the top church leaders of the day, the apostles Peter (Cephas - the given him by Jesus meaning 'rock'), and the *'brothers of the Lord'* (9:5 - a term that could mean Jesus actual brothers or perhaps a general term used for the church leaders in Jerusalem).

Nevertheless, Paul's point here is that proof of his apostleship is not based on the receipt of benefits, but the commission of Christ; and as an apostle by this standard he has the 'right' to be helped with benefits, whether or not he accepts them or uses them. He is *'free'* (9:1)! His list of these benefits is interesting; the basic provision of food and drink represents basic earthly needs, and the right to be accompanied by a wife is surely a humanitarian necessity. For Paul, the fact he has chosen to work for a living in Corinth is nothing to do with any 'right' (9:6), merely a personal choice made 'on mission' in the belief that this was of least hinderance for the proclamation of the Gospel. But the principle still stands; for the benefit of every other church leader and missionary who has ever worked, he declares that they should be given what they need to live, *'whoever does not eat the fruit of the vineyard he has planted, or drink the milk of the flock he has shepherded?'* (9:7).

### ***The evidence of Scripture and what it reveals (9:8-10)***

Paul now turns to scripture to justify his point, quoting Deuteronomy 25:4; *'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading grain'*. Clearly, the original text refers simply to good agricultural practice, but by the time of Christ, Judaism had already used this text in a different way, to justify the support of priests and levites who worked in the Temple. Levi, including the priests of Aaron's line received no inherited land in Israel on the understanding that their job was to serve the Lord. They were therefore made dependent on the freewill generosity of the rest of Israel for their living (Joshua 13:14,33). In the course of time this generosity was not always forthcoming, and Jewish commentaries on the Old Testament of Jesus' day use the text from Deuteronomy to justify the need for Israel to provide for the needs of levites and priests.

Paul then uses the same well known principle to apply to apostles. He tells the largely Gentile congregation at Corinth to accept standard Old Testament teaching; *is God concerned for the ox? Does He not really speak for our sakes?'* (9:9,10), and argues that an apostle has the right to material support from a congregation. At the end of this paragraph there is a significant twist to the matter; Paul says, *'if others share this claim on you, how much more should we?'* (9:12). It is a sharp comment. Other apostles such as Apollos were receiving regular assistance from the church at Corinth, so why should he who founded the church not do the same?

### ***Setting aside rights of the sake of the Gospel! (9:11-14)***

The fact Paul does not claim this benefit is not the point. He argues the principle from scripture and he requires the Corinthians to accept this, not for his sake, but for the sake of ministers and apostles of the church who would come after him (9:13-14). He then explains why he has not accepted these scripturally justifiable provisions, and what he says is similar to his argument in chapter 8, where he insists that those of mature faith should be understanding of 'weaker' Christians in the matter of eating meat offered to idols. In the same way, he has not sought material benefit from the infant church at Corinth because this would have been detrimental to the planting of the church, a point we would take as obvious today. If someone is planting a church then we expect that they are supported financially from another church or organisation until the new church is large enough to provide for its leaders. Paul says that in planting the church at Corinth, *'we endured everything lest we place an obstacle in the way of Christ'* (9:12). Yet again, scripture tells us that nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of the Gospel; this is one of the most persistent themes of 1 Corinthians.

# Discipleship

## Application

### *Christian leadership*

One interesting point comes out of this passage, unrelated to its theme. Paul describes the work of an apostle in three ways; as like going into battle, as planting a vineyard, and as shepherding (9:7). These three are closely related to the three Biblical leadership qualities of king, priest and pastor, developed in the Old Testament and applied to Christ in the New. The king goes into battle, the priest tends the vineyard and the pastor shepherds the sheep; it is a fascinating model for church leadership today.

### *Sense and sensitivity*

This all boils down to what we could call '**sense and sensitivity**'. If we study Scripture, we will find principles by which we should govern the church, and we should use them. But Paul argues that from the basis of this common '**sense**', we also need the '**sensitivity**' of knowing when the Holy Spirit is calling us to put all our principles aside for the sake of the Gospel. This is not just a matter of challenging church authority to say, 'I must do such and such because the Holy Spirit says so'. Rather, it is about sensitivity to understand when the Gospel priority of the church stands above all else. And in the matter of the payment of the salary of those doing the church's work, this is a sensitive issue!

### *Principles concerning the payment of church leaders.*

So what are we saying here about the payment of church leaders? Are we saying that scriptural rules can be put aside for the sake of the Gospel? Well, yes. It is a good principle that the church pays for those who do its work, yet it is also right that in missionary situations or where churches are being planted, missionaries and evangelists should be supported by others until the fruit of their work becomes established. Certainly, if issues of money must not get in the way of the proclamation of the Gospel, and everything must be done to make sure that those on the front line are able to do their work and have the freedom to judge what is best.

In my opinion, one big question for today concerns how the church asks young people to raise money and 'pay themselves' for doing a year's Christian service. This and various apprenticeship schemes often fall short of adequate provision, and depend on people being willing to work voluntarily whilst under the disciplines of leadership. I struggle with such schemes because I see no financial justification for them within Scripture, and at a time when many young people in my own country, for example, struggle to get jobs with high youth unemployment, then we are taking advantage of young people. Of course, some churches can afford to pay all who do their work, but many cannot and need volunteer work from all except a pastor, irrespective of age. I nevertheless feel that we should pay careful attention to Paul's scriptural principles about payment for work done in the Lord's service '*those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel*' (9:14). Many traditional churches are wealthy, and need to use their money for the work of the Kingdom.

## **Ideas for what to do**

- *Explore in your church how much money goes into maintaining its ministry and how much goes into exploring God's future priorities?*
- *What compromises of faith are necessary for God's people to be effective witnesses to His people today*

## **Questions (for use in groups)**

1. *What does this passage teach us about paying for church leadership, and what does this mean for the church today? Who are the church's 'apostles' today? And what work do they do?*
2. *What cultural barriers are we being called to overcome today in order to preach the Gospel?*

## Final Prayer

Lord God, You have heard Your people confess their sins and struggle with them for centuries. Come to us now like a torrent of water, and flow through us by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Cleanse us, and make us victorious over all evil; thank You Lord God: AMEN