

# First Corinthians 9

## **Introduction:**

1. This interesting chapter introduced a variety of minor subjects, while Paul continued against abusing Christian liberty.
2. The attitudes and conduct in matters of liberty, especially eating meat offered to idols, caused much strife in this church.
3. Three chapters deal with meat offered to idols (8-10), with the middle chapter discreetly continuing the argument; we will also see three chapters dedicated to spiritual gifts with a wise chapter in the middle dealing with charity (12-14).
4. These three chapters reveal divine wisdom in persuasion, and the numerous rhetorical questions (20) show their force.
5. To fully and properly grasp this chapter, you must view it in the larger context of sacrificing Christian liberty for others.
6. There is instruction at three levels – the overall lesson about sacrificing liberty, the subordinate lessons like giving, and several unrelated jewels found by valuing every word of God, such as two arguments against Catholicism in 9:5.
7. After several peripheral lessons, that support the one general point, he will expressly return to meat and idols (10:14-33).
8. Having introduced the church controversy over meat offered to idols, Paul is expanding his personal example from 8:13.

## **Outline of Chapter 9:**

1. Paul's own personal liberty (1-6)
2. Paul's right to ministerial support (7-14)
3. Paul's rejection of support (15-19)
4. Paul's sacrifice of liberty (20-23)
5. Paul's example of temperance (24-27).

### **9:1 Paul presented his personal liberty as an apostle of Christ for them to consider his example.**

- A. Consider well he had just made a bold statement of willingness for personal sacrifice (8:13).
- B. By using four rhetorical questions, Paul appealed to them to consider his very great liberty.
- C. If any other man was an apostle, then Paul was more, for the Lord had specially chosen him.
- D. If any other man had Christian liberty, then Paul as the great apostle had much more (v19).
- E. If any other man was sure of God's approval, Paul had more by virtue of having seen Christ.
- F. If any other man had fruit to a spiritual account, Paul had more by the very church at Corinth.
- G. Apostles had to have seen the risen Lord Jesus Christ to qualify for the office (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:2-3,8,21-22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39-42; 13:30-31; I Cor 15:3-7; Heb 2:1-4).
- H. And Paul saw Him by special arrangement (Acts 9:17; 22:14-15,18; 26:16; I Cor 15:8-10)!
- I. Apostles in the Mormon Church or among the Charismatics in our own city are plain frauds.

### **9:2 The Corinthians were the last people on earth with any right to question Paul's apostleship.**

- A. Paul is not saying he was not an apostle elsewhere; but for the sake of argument he stressed the obvious apostleship he had in Corinth by virtue of the fruit in establishing a church there.
- B. What Paul had done in the city of Corinth in establishing this church was proof of his calling.
- C. The work of an apostle was to be an evangelist in preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ to those who had not heard, and Paul was the greatest of these we read about in Scripture.
- D. Paul will use similar reasoning later against this very same critical church (II Cor 3:1-6).

### **9:3 Paul was not hesitant to answer the Corinthian brethren that envied and criticized him.**

- A. There were false teachers, envious teachers, and critical teachers at Corinth to examine Paul.
- B. They resented his authority and reputation, as they wanted it for themselves (II Cor 11:18).
- C. It is a rule of the gospel: the more righteous a man, the less others esteem him; and this was shown to the ultimate degree in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (John 15:18-25).
- D. We shall see this envy and strife against Paul often (II Cor 3:1-6; 10:7-10; Phil 1:15-17).
- E. Paul is about to show them an example of self-denial for the benefit of others to crush them!
- F. There may have been some questioning his right to support, a wife, and quitting work (4-6), for he makes a clear reference to them supporting other ministers.

- 9:4 **Paul had the authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ to secure his livelihood from them.**
- A. The word “power” is to be understood as meaning Paul’s right, authority, or privilege.
  - B. The eating and drinking here is reference to provision of a minister’s basic necessities.
    - 1. Jesus Christ had taught this rule of “eating and drinking” to His apostles (Luke 10:7-8).
    - 2. The context indicates that Paul was pursuing his right and sacrifice of support (9:3-19).
  - C. He is dealing with general privileges by context; he is not referring to meat offered to idols.
- 9:5 **Paul had the authority and liberty to have a wife as much as any other apostle of Christ.**
- A. Again, the word “power” is used here as it is often in the Bible for right or authority (7:4).
  - B. Paul had as much right as any apostle to have a wife and financial support for both of them.
  - C. Paul is showing how he lived sacrificially for Jesus Christ, though he had very great liberty.
  - D. The other apostles and the brothers of Jesus Christ had wives, which Paul had chosen against.
  - E. Paul was one of those special men who became eunuchs for Christ’s sake (Matt 19:10-12).
  - F. A true wife for a Christian man must be in the Lord; she must a sister in Christ (7:39; 11:11).
  - G. The happiest spouses are those who understand and exploit their position in Christ (I Pet 3:7).
  - H. The brethren of the Lord are included as another proof against Rome’s perpetual virginity of Mary (Matt 1:25; 12:46-50; 13:55-56; John 7:1-10; Ps 69:8; Acts 1:14; Gal 1:19).
  - I. Why did the Spirit add the Lord’s brothers? For us coming later to use it against Catholicism.
  - J. Cephas is included as another proof against Rome’s celibacy (Matt 8:14 cp I Tim 4:1-3).
  - K. Why did the Spirit add Peter by name? For us coming later to use it against Catholicism.
- 9:6 **Paul had the authority and liberty to avoid other employment to be an apostle full-time.**
- A. Here again, the word “power” is used to describe the right, authority, or rule to do a thing.
  - B. Paul implied here (1) other ministers were supported and (2) Barnabas and he were not.
  - C. The word order is unusual for us. It may be read, “Or Barnabas and I only, have we not ...?”
  - D. Paul did labor with his hands at Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla making tents (Acts 18:1-3).
- 9:7 **Paul appealed to nature and several reasonable examples that ministers deserve support.**
- A. Soldiers did not voluntarily enter the army and pay their own way and supplies (Luke 3:14).
  - B. Vinedressers did not plant and care for vineyards without compensation from the fruit.
  - C. Shepherds did not protect a flock and yet not participate at all in the products of the flock.
  - D. If you are thinking a flock of sheep and questioning their milk, think goats (Prov 27:23-27)!
  - E. Here the Bible illustrates appealing to nature and common sense (I Cor 11:14; Rom 1:26-27).
- 9:8 **Paul did not only argue from nature on ministerial support, but he also used Moses’ law.**
- A. When Paul spoke “as a man,” he was taking his argument from nature and reason (Rom 3:5).
  - B. His natural arguments, which were valid, were confirmed and supported in Moses’ Law.
  - C. Our most powerful reasoning is to appeal to God’s mind as revealed in Scripture (Is 8:20).
  - D. Yet there are lessons taught in nature and the reality of things that help teach us wisdom.
- 9:9 **Paul quoted from Moses about the care of oxen and asked if it might apply to ministers.**
- A. The safest and most powerful argument is to say with Jesus, “It is written,” (Matt 4:4,8,10).
    - 1. David and Isaiah told us to get truth on all things from Scripture (Ps 119:128; Is 8:20).
    - 2. Paul told Timothy Scripture was able to make the man of God perfect (II Tim 3:16-17).
  - B. Moses gave a clear rule without a context to allow oxen to eat from their work (Deut 25:4).
  - C. Paul, ever the masterful logician, asks the inspired question, “Doth God take care for oxen?”
    - 1. This is holy reasoning from the lesser to the greater, for a minister is greater than an ox.
    - 2. A man walking in the Spirit and reading his Bible daily will learn to apply such wisdom.
  - D. It is our wisdom to also see the great value of a God-called and supported minister (Pr 14:4).

- 9:10 **Paul strongly applied the quote to ministerial support and added further illustrations.**
- A. God did care for oxen, but the principle of such mercy and reward applied more to ministers.
    1. If we are slaves to literal word usage, we must say God did not give a rule for oxen at all.
    2. If we are slaves to literal word usage, we will be confounded either in Deut 25:4 or here!
    3. But mothers of teenagers have said, “All he does is eat!” But we know he also sleeps.
    4. We understand Paul to be saying this principle applies more to ministers than to oxen.
  - B. Paul grabbed two other illustrations to further apply this principle to the support of ministers.
    1. Comparing a minister to a plowman, he reasoned that a plowman should be able to plow in hope of a reward, which would be great encouragement to a plowman in spring, when the fields are bare and any hope of a harvest at all is still 4-6 months away.
    2. Comparing a minister to a thresher, he reasoned the thresher who works the grain with hope of a good yield should also be able to partake of the harvest the plowman hoped for.
    3. Both illustrations argue from the lesser to the greater, by comparing work in earth to the work in men’s souls. If it is reasonable for farmers, then how much more for ministers?
- 9:11 **Paul pursued comparing a minister to a farmer by arguing the reasonableness of support.**
- A. Ministers sow spiritual things in the hearts of men in the hope of a great yield in their souls.
  - B. Is it unfair for such men to realize a little compensation from the material things of hearers?
  - C. Here is the wise arrangement of God and the proper division of labor: God calls, prepares, and appoints men to the ministry to invest spiritually in the souls of His children, and those hearers are to use their carnal vocations to support the minister economically and materially.
  - D. Adam Smith did not discover or invent division of labor – God revealed it long ago (Ga 6:6)!
- 9:12 **Though other ministers at Corinth were being supported, Paul and Barnabas declined it.**
- A. Can you believe this church’s audacity to support other ministers, but not Paul and Barnabas?
  - B. Again, “power” is used to describe authority, right, or privilege of others to financial support.
  - C. The apostle Paul, superior as he was to any minister in Corinth, had a greater right to support.
  - D. Paul and Barnabas chose rather to suffer dishonor in order to assist Corinthian conversions.
  - E. Here is proof Paul was not only teaching ministerial support, but more so sacrificing liberty.
- 9:13 **Paul added another argument of Levites and priests, who were compensated by their work.**
- A. Following our Lord, Paul questioned their Bible knowledge (Matt 12:3; 19:4; 21:16; 22:31).
  - B. Both Levites and priests were supported financially and materially by the sacrificial system.
  - C. The tribe of Levi did not have inheritance in Canaan, but they received a tithe (Nu 18:20-21).
- 9:14 **God ordained for gospel ministers to be supported financially by the church, like Levites.**
- A. The adverbial connectors “even so” indicate the New Testament follows the same principle.
  - B. While a tithe is not taught directly in the New Testament, it is taught indirectly right here.
  - C. If God has called a man to preach the gospel, it is the duty of hearers to provide his living.
  - D. This is an ordinance of the gospel as much as baptism or the Lord’s Supper, which are often given exalted status by following Rome and daughters with 2 to 7 sacraments (ordinances).
  - E. Those churches and pastors who neglect this ordinance have done much damage to the kingdom of Jesus Christ i.e. Primitive Baptists, who falsely reacted against a paid ministry.
  - F. If “you get what you pay for” is true, it is certainly true relative to supporting your pastor.
  - G. While ministers should not be paid, or seek to be paid, exorbitantly, yet they should be paid enough to live comfortably for the carefree encouragement of their souls (II Chron 31:4).
  - H. Twelve tribes gave one tribe a tithe of all income, so Levi earned 120% of average income.
  - I. How can any man grudge giving 10%+ to God for the welfare of his and his family’s souls?

- 9:15 **Paul had declined ministerial support in order to have an impeccable gospel reputation.**
- A. Though there were numerous arguments in favor of support, Paul had not ever taken any.
  - B. And he declared that his arguments were not for any support that he sought from them now.
  - C. Remember, his great purpose in this chapter is teaching self-denial for the benefit of others.
  - D. Paul strongly stated his case for a perfect ministerial reputation by foregoing any support.
  - E. By “glorying,” Paul meant an impeccable and impeachable reputation for Christ’s sake; for his great ambition, his goal of glory, was to help the gospel by preaching for free (v18)!
  - F. Ministers may preach on giving at times simply to preach the whole counsel of God for the profit of His saints, when they do not have a single thought about padding their pockets at all.
  - G. A godly minister will consider his financial reputation more serious than death (Ex 18:21; I Sam 8:3; Isaiah 56:11; Jer 6:13; 8:10; Mic 3:5; Mal 1:10; Matt 23:14; John 12:6; Acts 20:33; II Cor 7:2; I Thess 2:5; I Tim 3:3,8; 6:6-10; Titus 1:7,11; I Pet 5:2; II Pet 2:14-15; Jude 1:11).
- 9:16 **Paul did not preach the gospel out of personal ambition, but rather of fear and necessity.**
- A. There was no ambition in Paul for glory by the praise of men or by their financial reward.
  - B. Paul was not a dumb college freshman, who randomly picked a ministerial major for his life.
  - C. Paul, obeying Jesus, was not puffed up about his role as teacher of the church (Matt 23:5-12).
  - D. Jesus Christ had called Paul to preach, and he did so by fear and obligation of his great Lord.
  - E. While a man may desire the office of a bishop, he ought to do his work with Paul’s heart.
- 9:17 **Paul did not choose the apostleship as a career path, but rather was put in it by Christ.**
- A. It was never Paul’s choice to be the apostle of the Gentiles. It was not his vocational choice.
  - B. He did not hear a great preacher and then decide he liked the glory and prestige of the office.
  - C. If it had been his choice, then he would have great personal satisfaction in being an apostle.
  - D. Since it was not his choice, then God’s great use of him was evident to him and to all others.
- 9:18 **The reward this special servant of Christ obtained was to keep an impeccable reputation.**
- A. If Paul did not have personal satisfaction or financial remuneration, what was his reward?
  - B. His reward was making the hearing of the gospel free, so that any could partake without cost.
  - C. His reward was making the gospel minister spotless, so that none could criticize the office.
  - D. Paul went beyond the call of duty, for he willingly sacrificed the liberty he had abundantly.
  - E. He was so committed and dedicated to Jesus Christ and the gospel that being the greatest apostle and not taking support was a special joy to him in keeping his office spotless and making the gospel free to others.
  - F. The next verse will finally bring this reasoning of Paul into focus – he sacrificed for others!
- 9:19 **Though Paul was greater than all men, he had chosen to be a servant to all to save more.**
- A. When he declared he was “free from all men,” he meant he was not inferior or in subjection to any man; he had total liberty. We had this statement earlier in context of apostleship (9:1).
  - B. Paul had the liberty, authority, and right to impose apostolic rule on them for his own benefit.
  - C. He became a servant to all men, without remuneration, in order to save as many as possible.
- 9:20 **In addition to financial support, Paul also accommodated the Jews and the love of the Law.**
- A. Those understanding his overall reasoning of chapters 8-10 can follow his new move here.
  - B. Paul not only forewent financial support to serve others, he also accommodated weakness.
  - C. Paul went as far as he could in godly honesty and integrity to accommodate converted Jews.
    1. Many converted Jews were still hung up on the value of the ceremonial Law of Moses.
    2. Pharisees infected the church with heretical notions about circumcision (Acts 15:1-5).

3. Paul was willing to circumcise Timothy, but would not Titus (Acts 16:1-5; Gal 2:1-5).
  4. Paul was willing to take on a Jewish oath to soothe Jewish believers (Acts 21:17-26).
  5. There were Jews still holding to certain Jewish days, which Paul allowed (Rom 14:5-6).
  6. During the time of reformation, Paul was willing to bend for the Jews (Hebrews 9:10).
- D. Paul also went as far as he could in godly honesty to accommodate Gentiles loving the Law.
- E. In none of these verses are we to understand a compromise of truth (John 4:21-24; Gal 2:5).
- F. During the time of reformation, 30AD to 70AD, the two covenants operated side-by-side.

9:21 **Paul was also willing to accommodate those who had easily discarded the ceremonial law.**

- A. When Paul met Jews or Gentiles free from the Law, he went as far as possible with them.
- B. But he would not engage in hypocrisy, for which he publicly censured Peter (Gal 2:11-21).
- C. He was not without any law toward God, in that he still observed the moral aspects of law.
- D. But he kept the Law as it was in Christ Jesus, Who had ended the ceremonial (Col 2:15-16).

9:22 **Paul was weak to win the weak and was willing to accommodate any for their salvation.**

- A. The weak were those with weak consciences toward meat offered to idols and other things.
- B. Paul being made all things to all men that he might by all means save some has been abused.
  1. This does not mean Paul shamed himself with long hair in order to save the hippies.
  2. This does not mean Paul learned and played rap music to win the African-Corinthians.
  3. Paul did not write a paraphrase Bible called The Cotton Patch Version for inner city kids.
  4. Paul did not start a basketball league to get the reprobate jocks to listen to his preaching.
- C. Let us stop for the poor weak souls that believe “all means all, and that’s all ‘all’ means.”
  1. They love “all” in verses like I Timothy 2:4 and 2:6 to promote universal redemption.
  2. Will they get excited and apply the three occurrences of “all” in this verse the same way?
  3. But here is your best cross-reference to kindly remind them of the use of this word “all.”
  4. Tell them you deny Paul as a practicing sodomite using any perversion to win sodomites!
  5. Your second-best cross-reference is Luke 2:1, where “all the world” was taxed by Rome!
- D. Paul is only talking about compromising matters of liberty to gain those fearing the Lord.
  1. Keep in mind that Paul was writing in the middle of the time of reformation (Heb 9:10).
  2. He did not compromise with Epicureans to see if his gluttony might save some of them.
  3. The LORD Jesus Christ never degraded His gospel down to street level to the reprobates.
  4. John did not say, “Don’t worry, your cool!” when confronted by sinners (Luke 3:10-14).
  5. The gospel of Jesus Christ requires repentance of publicans and harlots (Matthew 21:32).
  6. Paul’s idea of compromise was to go to synagogues, where he knew people feared God.

9:23 **Paul was willing to accommodate others and deny himself in order to promote the gospel.**

- A. Paul is giving several lessons here in this chapter about his willing to compromise for others.
- B. He was willing to give up incredible liberties like a wife and support to help conversions.
- C. His powerful reasoning in this chapter is leading toward giving up meat for weak brethren.
- D. Are you as willing to accommodate others and deny yourself in order to save anyone else?

9:24 **Only one runner in a race receives the prize, and Christians ought to live as for one prize.**

- A. Corinthians, living in Greece, would have no problem at all grasping athletic illustrations.
- B. Though there are many runners in any given race, only one of them can be the true winner.
- C. Of course, this philosophy was before the PTA, which decided everyone is a winner!
- D. Christians should live the Christian life with the same focus and application to be the winner.
  1. There are so many lazy and selfish Christians, who drag around the track and are lapped.
  2. Paul thought second place was despicable, so he pressed toward the prize (Phil 3:8-14).
  3. The Christian life is not a “Fun Run” at the local park; it is a serious race (Heb 12:1-4).

4. Having introduced the concept of winning, Paul next detailed the temperance necessary.
- E. Though this is the fifth part to the chapter, Paul is still pursuing godly sacrifice for others.
  1. Chapters 8-10 teach self-denial to help weak brethren troubled by meat offered to idols.
  2. While Paul pursued his overall lesson, he was able to teach about others things as well.
  3. In these final four verses, Paul used athletics to illustrate the temperate life of self-denial.

9:25 **Athletes are very temperate in denying themselves, and Christians should be even better.**

- A. Every man that wants to be the singular winner Paul has just described must be temperate.
- B. Athletes deny themselves sleep, comfort, food, rest, pleasure, friends, careers, and many other things that distract them from their single goal of maximizing training to win a prize.
- C. The concept and definition of temperance was severely abused by Prohibition, where the meaning of the word was seriously altered to accommodate a Pharisee position on alcohol.
  1. **Temperance.** The practice or habit of restraining oneself in provocation, passion, desire, etc.; rational self-restraint. Self-restraint and moderation in action of any kind.
  2. The Temperance Movement was a misnomer, demanding total abstinence, or teetotalism.
  3. Temperance is properly the self-discipline and self-denial of restraining bodily appetites.
- D. Christians ought to be much more temperate, as they live to obtain the prize of Jesus Christ.
  1. In Paul's day, an athlete would live the most stoic life to obtain a crown of olive leaves.
  2. In our day, an athlete lives the most stoic life to obtain a ridiculous Olympic gold medal.
  3. We seek the reward of hearing from God, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

9:26 **Paul used the temperate example of runners and fighters in his pursuit of pleasing Christ.**

- A. The adverb "so" is used twice, connecting this verse with the temperance just explained.
- B. Paul lived his Christian life with the disciplined focus and temperate self-denial that athletes use to pursue their ambition for earthly crowns.
  1. Paul did not just amble around the track; he ran with vigor and zeal according to a plan.
  2. Paul did not punch himself out by swinging; he only punched when he knew it would hit.
  3. He had the same disciplined and dedicated approach of athletes to pleasing Jesus Christ.
- C. Paul lived the Christian life with great focus, temperance, and self-denial to obey the gospel.

9:27 **Paul disciplined all his fleshly appetites with temperance in order to live what he preached.**

- A. The first clause is easier to grasp, if the word order is changed: "But I keep my body under."
- B. The disjunctive "but" is contrasting the undisciplined athlete of 9:26 with Paul's temperance.
- C. Paul is explaining how he avoided running uncertainly and how he avoided beating the air.
- D. Paul defined temperance here – keeping his body under and bringing it into subjection.
  - a. Paul's bodily appetites did not rule him; he rather ruled his bodily appetites for Christ.
  - b. Paul did not allow "bad moods" to control him; he controlled his moods to not be bad.
  - c. He rejected his personal preferences in order to serve a higher calling of pleasing Christ.
  - d. He ruled his spirit from being destroyed by bad events or lusting after forbidden things.
- D. His purpose in living such a temperate lifestyle was to avoid any conflict with his preaching.
  - a. He had stated this early with these words: "And this I do for the gospel's sake" (9:23).
  - b. He was willing to use any means – any self-denial – to assist the message of his gospel.
- E. He chose to do whatever it took to be consistent with his preaching and not be a castaway.
  - a. We must answer this question: "Did Paul admit the possibility of losing his salvation?"
  - b. What did he intend by using all means of temperance to avoid being a personal castaway?
  - c. This is the only use of this word in the whole Bible, so we must look elsewhere for help.
  - d. Other places teach Paul could not lose his eternal life (John 10:26-30; Rom 8:29-39).
  - e. But a carnal life could ruin the profitableness of his ministry (I Tim 4:16; II Tim 4:10).
  - f. Consider the examples of Eli and Saul, both of whom lost important offices by sin.

- g. As he will show in chapter ten, he feared displeasing God and being rejected (10:1-13).
- h. Let it be understood that Paul was saved and could not be lost again (II Tim 1:12; 4:6-8).
- i. Yet at another level, Paul had the great goal of securing a good resurrection (Phil 3:8-11).
- j. Many ministers, like Judas Iscariot, will be rejected, though successful (Matt 7:21-23).
- k. So Paul and Peter pressed laying hold of eternal life (I Tim 6:12,17-19; II Pet 1:10-11).
- l. This is contrary to decisional regeneration and the “once saved, always saved” mantra.

**Conclusion:**

- 1. Paul gave an incredible example of desire for the salvation of others – their full gospel conversion (9:22-23).
- 2. We should compromise where we can in order to accommodate and help others with kindness and gentleness.
- 3. We should be making every effort possible to secure our everlasting crown, especially in light of athletes.
- 4. The fact that a man has preached, even preached well, and even converted men, is not proof of eternal life.
- 5. How fearfully and solemnly gospel ministers should take heed to themselves and the doctrine (I Tim 4:16).
- 6. Ministers, and certainly saints, should live the most humble and pious lives to truly lay hold of eternal life.
- 7. What glorious ministers of the gospel there would be, if every minister were gripped like our brother Paul.
- 8. Here is a most sober lesson for these Corinthians, and for you reader, against pushing the limits of liberty.
- 9. For it is your willingness and ability to rule your flesh that is the evidence of a child of God bound for heaven.
- 10. Every saint must be willing to follow Paul’s example in sacrificing their liberty to edify the souls of others.
- 11. In any situation you find yourself in the future, God’s ministers should be supported for numerous reasons.
- 12. When reading the Old Testament, it is important for you to gain wisdom by seeing God’ mind in the precepts.
- 13. Are you as committed to serving the body of Christ by self-denial and sacrifice as this great apostle?
- 14. Are you temperate in all things to win the prize of Christ’s high calling as athletes are to win their prizes?

**Additional study:**

- 1. The entire chapter should be understood in the larger context of chapter 8-10, where meat offered to idols was the issue.
- 2. The Holy Spirit provided an excellent commentary on this section of I Corinthians in the similar chapter of Romans 14.