

NOTE: The following excerpt is offered in review of chapter 9 from
Comments on First and Second Corinthians, Leslie M. Grant, chapter 9, pp 53-58.

Chapter 9

Because of the lowliness and grace on the part of the apostle, such as chapter 8 shows in the consideration of his brethren, there were some who would use this as an occasion to belittle him. He made no arrogant show of his liberty or of his authority as an apostle, as did "false apostles" (2 Cor. 11:13-20); and evidently some, on this account, moved by fleshly vanity, dared to question whether he were an apostle at all.

Behind this was the subtle enmity of Satan; for in order to nullify the truth of the unity, order, and discipline of the assembly, he uses this means of discrediting the chosen vessel whom God is using to communicate these truths.

Paul appeals therefore to their consciences. Did he not have the credentials of an apostle? They could not honorably dispute the fact that he had seen the Lord, nor certainly that they themselves had been converted through him. Not that one of these facts alone was proof of apostleship, but these, together with the fact of his own witness of God's definite designation of him as such, was certainly evidence that their consciences could not ignore. His very character was contrary to that of a man of false pretenses. Therefore, their own state as Christians was proof of his apostleship. Whether others recognized this or not, they ought to.

Did they think that an apostle should throw his weight about, as would a mere politician among the Gentiles? Was it because Paul had no right to eat and drink that he did not make himself dependent upon the support of the Corinthians? Did he not have a right to be married to a sister in the Lord, and take her with him on his journeys, as did Peter, and other brethren? And since he did not do this, did this make him inferior to them? Or, of all the apostles, did Paul and Barnabas alone have no right to forbear working with their hands for their own support? How sad that all of these things, the fruit of devotion to the Lord were interpreted by some as evidence of Paul's insignificance!

If a man's country call him to war, is he expected to pay all his own expenses? Typically of course, this is the declaring of the gospel in an enemy's country, and it is thoroughly right that one should be supported by such labor. Or if one plants a vineyard, should he not be allowed to eat of its fruit? This would speak of the labor of establishing the assembly. Or, in feeding a flock, is one denied even the milk of the flock? Here it is the labor of

shepherding the assembly. In each case it is only morally right that those who receive blessing should help in the sustenance of the laborer.

And the apostle asks, is this merely human reasoning? Did not the law, the Old Testament, affirm the same? And here is another strong confirmation of the fact that the Old Testament Scriptures were written particularly for our benefit in this present day. This quotation from Deuteronomy 25:4 is shown to apply with far more emphasis to the Church than to the case of a literal ox. Not that verse 9 implies that it had no literal reference to an ox; for of course the Jews were expected to have proper concern for the life of their beasts; yet this was only minor compared to the spiritual significance of it.

For the one who plowed should certainly do so in hope of an eventual harvest; if there were no such prospect, why plow at all? And he who threshes, is he to have no part whatever in the results of his threshing? He certainly threshes in hope of some yield of grain, and should himself be partaker in that hope.

The apostle had sown spiritual things to the Corinthians and there were results. Would it have been any large return if he had reaped their support in temporal things? It was only normal and right. Others had used this right, and if so, was Paul not even more entitled to it than they? But he had not used it, rather had suffered all things in desire to avoid every possible hindrance to the prospering of the gospel of Christ.

Verse 13 refers to the Levites who served in connection with the temple, and the priests waiting at the altar. The Levites received the tithes of the people (Num. 18:21); and as well as sharing in this, the priests received part of the sacrifices that they offered (Lev. 6:26; 7:6,14). In this way provision was made for their support. And similarly God had ordained that the gospel preacher should "live of the gospel." This does not mean that the preacher himself is at liberty to take collections or to make any charge for his preaching. This is written, not to the servant, but the assembly, to stress the assembly's responsibility of willingly providing such support, not as a salary, but entirely by voluntary exercise. The servant in preaching is to practice the principle, "Freely ye have received; freely give." And the saints are to practice the same principle in their temporal care for the servant

But Paul had used none of these things: though entitled to it, he had taken no support at all from the

Corinthians. Nor did he now write with the object that this might be the case. Indeed, he would rather die than have taken away his rejoicing in this self-sacrifice for the sake of the gospel. For as to the preaching of the gospel itself, this was nothing for him to boast of. He had no choice whatever in this matter: necessity was laid upon him. God had called him, and he had no alternative. "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." Such being the case, one might as well have a willing heart in this matter, and Paul considers that a spirit of willingness will reap reward. If, on the other hand, he should be unwilling, this does not change the fact that he was responsible for the administration of the gospel committed to him: he is still required to prove faithful in this.

But let us mark well what Paul considers his reward, as given in the New Translation: "That in announcing the glad tidings I make the glad tidings costless (to others), so as not to have made use, as belonging to me, of my right in (announcing) the glad tidings." This is the opposite of mere material reward: he would willingly forego all material benefits connected with the gospel, thinking of this self-sacrifice itself as a reward. For his own soul rejoiced in doing this for the sake of others. Personally free from all men, made free by the boundless grace of God in Christ Jesus, yet he had made himself a bond-servant to all, with the object of gaining every soul he possibly could for Christ.

And this spirit of service went even further; for he would use every effort to adapt himself to the circumstances of those to whom he brought the gospel. If theirs was a Jewish background and culture, he would adapt himself to this. If they were under law, he would from this viewpoint deal with them, with the object of presenting Christ. If they were without law, he would leave aside the question of the law's claims in his contacts with them, but use their own viewpoint by which to win them to Christ. Not that he would be lawless, "but in lawful subjection to Christ," as is a more exact translation. If they were weak, he would come down beside them, to show them the weakness that finds its answer of strength in Christ, and to gain them for Him. Being "made all things to all men" was by no means giving up proper

moral principles but sacrificing his own comfort and natural preferences in order to enter into the circumstances of others.

This he did for the sake of the gospel (which was so exceedingly precious to him), that the gospel might produce much fruit, and Paul himself have the joy of being "partaker with it," that is, have part with the gospel in its fruitfulness. He is no mere salesman, but his heart is vitally bound up in the preciousness and value of the message of grace entrusted to him.

There may be many running in the race of Christianity, but not all will receive the prize, that which is eternal, incorruptible. The fact of running is not enough to obtain the prize: certainly one must run in such a way that he will finish the course. If a runner is really striving for victory, he will be "temperate in all things," not self-indulgent, but self-disciplined. If one knows nothing of self-discipline, though he may be running, he is not a Christian at all, though he would like to pass as one. He is running uncertainly, as one who beats the air. He does not have the proper end in view, nor does he make true progress. His fleshly appetites master him, rather than he keeping them in control. He can even preach to others, and eventually be cast away himself, for eternity.

But Paul makes it clear that he had no slightest fear of this as to himself. It was not his character to run uncertainly, as one who beats the air. If he had been merely this (and the principle applies to anyone who professes Christianity), merely an uncertain, undisciplined professor of Christianity, as was the case with "false apostles" (2 Cor. 11:13), then he would be eternally cast away, even after preaching to others. It was infinitely more important to be a true Christian than to be a preacher. The true servant runs certainly, he does not beat the air, he keeps his body under subjection.

End excerpt from L. M. Grant.

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