

Apostles are not above sacrificing their own self interests. Certainly the Lord Jesus wasn't either. But why does Paul go to such great lengths here to establish his apostleship and his rights? This is not the first time in this letter he has raised the issue of his authority, nor will it be the last. In the early part of the epistle he has pointed up their propensity to form parties of believers behind different leaders, some of whom were putting him down in order to exalt themselves and their position. This issue resurfaces in chapter 4(1-5) where they were examining him, and again in the second epistle as well.

Throughout the epistles to the Corinthians we will see several important themes and issues interwoven together, appearing here and there, seemingly out of context at first glance. But actually Paul is handling these issues just as they are in real life, complex and intertwined. These epistles are very different in that way from Romans which is a very organized presentation of the basics of the gospel and the truth that flows from it.

Here in chapters 8-10 he handles the issue of genuinely **stumbling another** by exercising our liberty/freedom in Christ. We can become so enamored of this freedom that we are found either flaunting it or defending it in a fleshly way. If we are free we are then free to love one another without even thinking of our own liberty and rights. But instead of this we must beware of rebellious feelings against those who seem to be attempting to limit "my" liberty. These feelings do not come from the new nature, not from love. If we have to maintain and defend our rights we are in one sense enslaved by this. But instead we are free to walk with the Lord and with one another in love, apart from sin. We are free to yield our rights for the well being of our brethren and the love of Christ. And we are free to follow the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are free to listen and consider with exercise, counsel and exhortations of others genuinely concerned with our spiritual welfare, our service and God's glory.

So why does Paul launch into a defense of his apostleship? In order to set the stage to

demonstrate his liberty, even as an apostle, to give up his rights for the sake of others. At the same time he shames those who are **competing** with him for status and power. We see in Diotrephes (3John) the results of competition for power in the assembly. Paul doesn't stoop to compete, or to defend his power. He merely declares what God has established in making him an apostle. Clearly God did it, not Paul. And it is the same for every servant of God. God gifts and selects those He wants to serve Him. No authorization is needed from men. These competitors expose their self-important, self-centered thoughts and ambitions. How? By attributing to Paul the very attitudes they, in fact, were displaying.

Here Paul presents the credentials of his apostleship only to turn around and deny himself benefits of his apostleship. Furthermore, he doesn't just make this sacrifice in a vacuum simply for appearances. Nor is there eternal value in sacrificing for the sake of sacrificing. That kind of sacrifice merely feeds pride, either in the expectation or receiving of recognition, from men or God.

Matthew 6:1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. {alms: or, righteousness} {of your: or, with your} 2 Therefore when thou doest [thine] alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. {do not...: or, cause not a trumpet to be sounded} 3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: 4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly

No, Paul's sacrifice of his rights and liberties has an underlying genuine motive of love for others and for the Lord. As with the Lord's sacrifice, Paul's example of selflessness **benefits others**. The competitors saw his sacrificial life as a sign of weakness, and sought to take advantage of it.

But now we, through this passage, can learn the grace of God that goes into making an Apostle.

And we learn what powers, rights and liberties the apostles were given. By this we can identify false apostles. We also gain insights into what liberties and responsibilities a servant of the Lord has today.

The first **evidence of apostleship** he brings forward is that he has seen the Lord. We all look upon the Lord by faith, but Paul and the other apostles had seen Him with their very eyes. Not every believer that had seen the Lord was made an apostle. But every apostle had seen the Lord. Paul was the last of all, 1Cor. 15:8. God made no new apostles after Paul. Anyone who claims to be an apostle today is a liar, Revelation 2:2.

But the foremost evidence before the Corinthian believers of his apostleship was they themselves. His ministry was the means God used for their salvation. Had they forgotten this already? Their selfish power-seeking had dimmed their appreciation of just what he had done for them in bringing them the Gospel. In Acts we read of that. He was enduring much resistance from the Jews and was perhaps discouraged but the Lord himself appeared to him and said:

Acts 18:9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. 11 And he continued [there] a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. {continued there: Gr. sat there}

He stayed and preached by faith and the Assembly at Corinth was born.

(Note here in Acts 18 that the Lord says there were elect in this city. God had chosen them. Paul didn't know that, or who they were. But the Lord encouraged Paul to stay and preach to all, so that the elect would be saved. The others remain without excuse. So he preached and the elect repented. Glory to God! And so He desires to use us as well.)

Apostles had authority to marry. This reminds us of chapter 7 where Paul encourages singleness for those who desire to serve the Lord. He was unmarried but Peter and the Lord's brothers

(James and Jude) were married. As noted previously, there is absolutely no hint of celibacy as a requirement for being an apostle, much less for any lesser gift or position in the Church of God. See 1Timothy 4:1-3.

Apostles had authority to eat and drink. Religious dietary restrictions, common in the Law of Moses, most pagan religions, and currently in many so called Christian denominations (such as Lent) are not scriptural. (However prayer and fasting are still encouraged.) Jesus didn't restrict His diet beyond what was required of the Law He was born under. We aren't under it.

Apostles had the **right** to the financial support of other believers. They, and others in the Lord's work, did not have the right of support from unbelievers. In fact one of the things commending a genuine servant of the Lord was his taking nothing of the unbelievers. See 3John 7. Nevertheless, as we shall see, Paul often did not avail himself of this right. Watch for the different occasions he worked to provide for his needs as you read the Acts and other Epistles. The fact he didn't in Corinth allowed some to actually **challenge** his Apostleship. They wanted the prestige and benefits of a such a position for themselves. They seemed less interested in the sacrificial side of serving the Lord.

Nevertheless the servants (not just apostles) called by the Lord have the right to forbear working. And those blessed by their faithful, sacrificial ministry have the privilege of supporting them. Paul gives several examples from scripture and everyday life to demonstrate this principle. Simply put: **They who work are due a just payment for their labors**. Even working farm animals are considered worthy of their hire. Why not God's workmen? God's payout isn't limited just to the future day of rewards Paul spoke about earlier in chapters 3 and 4. For our encouragement, God lets us see some of the fruits of our labors now as well. And He sees to it that His servants are supported. And He uses us to help.

By Ron Canner, May 14, 2003