

"Am I Not An Apostle?" (1 Cor 9)

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Preachers: William HC, "Paul of Tarsus"

[0 : 0 0] So 1 Corinthians chapter 9. Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus, our Lord, with my own eyes?

Isn't it because of my work that you belong to the Lord? Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you. You yourselves are proof that I am the Lord's apostle.

This is my answer to those who question my authority. Don't we have the right to live in your homes and share your meals? Don't we have the right to bring a believing wife with us as the other apostles and the Lord's brothers do and as Peter does?

Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves? What soldier has to pay his own expenses? What farmer plants a vineyard and doesn't have the right to eat some of its fruit?

What shepherd cares for a flock of sheep and isn't allowed to drink some of the milk? Am I expressing merely a human opinion or does the law say the same thing? For the law of Moses says, you must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.

[1 : 1 0] Was God thinking only about oxen when he said this? Wasn't he actually speaking to us? Yes, it was written for us so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest.

Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren't we entitled to harvest of physical food and drink? If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported?

But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the good news about Christ. Don't you realize that those who work in the temple get their meals from the offerings brought to the temple?

And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the good news should be supported by those who benefit from it.

Yet, I have never used any of these rights. And I'm not writing this to suggest that I want to start now. In fact, I would rather die than lose my right to boast about preaching without charge.

[2 : 2 0] Yet, preaching the good news is not something I can boast about. I'm compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the good news. If I were doing this on my own initiative, I would deserve payment.

But I have no choice, for God has given me the sacred trust. What then is my pay? It is the opportunity to preach the good news without charging anyone. That's why I never demand my rights when I preach the good news.

Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ.

When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I can bring to Christ those who are under the law.

When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so that I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God. I obey the law of Christ.

[3 : 23] When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some.

I do everything to spread the good news and share in its blessings. Don't you realise that in a race, everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize?

So run to win. All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step.

I'm not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others, I myself might be disqualified.

And that is the word of God. So now I'm just going to invite the next speaker up. T■n■ koutou.

[4 : 38] T■n■ t■tou katoa. Ko paora t■ku ingoa. Greetings one and all. My name is Paul. And Mrs. Speaker, it is an honour to present my maiden speech to the English Assembly of PCBC.

I'm particularly humbled to find myself in this room full of distinguished guests from near and far, brothers and sisters, family and friends.

As this is my first time addressing this house, I want to give thanks for your kindness and hospitality. Surely this is the best place on earth to be on a Sunday at 4.30.

Gathered with God's people, singing His praises, hearing His word. Having just got off the boat from first century Ephesus moments ago, your welcome means more than you know.

Though, based on the weather recently, I should have brought another cloak. And thank you, Mrs. Speaker, for reading out chapter 9 of my letter to the Corinthian church.

[5 : 56] So, beloved, I'm grateful it's now on record, and I'm glad for the chance to expand on it for the next few minutes. Mrs. Speaker, in our day and age, it's become acceptable to stereotype people like myself as extremists.

So, let me share a little bit about my own faith. I was born and raised in the fair city of Tarsus in Sicilia. Like many of you, I count it a blessing to have grown up between cultures.

I could reo with the Romans. I could talk Torah with the Hebrews. After all, I had the best education. My parents sent me to the top private school in Jerusalem under Rabbi Gamaliel.

In fact, I was so sure I could please God just by doing the right things and saying the right words. All 613 lines of the church constitution I memorized.

I was so confident in my zeal for God. Some of my people, when they started worshipping some dusty old preacher from Jerusalem, from Galilee, I chased them down for my superiors.

[7 : 13] I wanted to lock them up. I'd hold their cloaks as they stoned them. But then I met the risen Lord Jesus himself on the road to Damascus.

He showed up and I was floored, and I was floored, blinded. Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? The Lord said to me. I had no answer.

The rumors were true. There was the risen Lord Jesus right in front of me. He really died and rose again. Everything the scriptures said about him is true.

And now, he's saved me from my sins. He's joined me to a new band of brothers and sisters. He's freed me from being a slave to pleasing others, to being a slave to my achievements or my culture.

And now, to live as Christ and to die as gain. And so, in the few minutes I have, Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few moments.

[8 : 17] Firstly, I want to take a few moments to make my defense because some are examining me and making accusations of me. In recent times, some in Corinth, as you heard in my letter, they've been questioning my background and my credentials.

My words don't wow them. My speeches aren't cool enough. They compare me to their worldly standards of successful speakers.

You know, those who write in, they make a big speech, they get paid the big bucks and then they shoot off again. I'll admit, I'm not your typical preacher.

I haven't got the looks of some of our previous speakers from last week. There's no global fan base for me. I'm not on social media. I don't fit the married with kids' stereotype.

My hair, it's graying a little bit too. In particular, though, some of my critics say I can't be an apostle because I haven't been baptizing everyone that I lead to Christ.

[9 : 24] And also, they say I can't be an apostle because I won't take their financial support. And so, they're finding reasons, all kinds of reasons, to just suspect my motives.

And yet, perhaps, they've forgotten. I've personally met the risen Lord Jesus. The fact that the Corinthians exist as a church, it's because I've been faithful to that calling, to preach the gospel to them.

That qualifies me, does it not, as one of the apostles appointed by Christ. And as I go about as an apostle, it's true, I have every right to receive support for what I do.

After all, all of us need to eat and drink, support our families like Peter and James support their families. Soldiers get paid.

Fruit growers eat their crops. Farmers get to try their own milk. Are apostles any different? And it's not just common sense, even our laws, the laws of our people say it.

[10 : 34] You remember that line, don't you, from Torah? Deuteronomy 25, 4, don't muzzle the ox while it's treading the grain. Do we preach Torah to cattle?

No. This law was for people because ox don't read Scripture. People do. These customs say that those who work for God and the gospel should have the right to be supported for the gospel.

If temple priests get fed and the Lord Jesus commands it, then surely I, Paul, have the right to receive support. Am I not an apostle? Yet one of the values I want to keep bringing to this, the people of this good house is that life is not just about my rights, my freedoms.

As I've said before to the Corinthians, I say to you too, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Loving my brothers and sisters is far more important than enjoying all my rights.

after all, that's how the Lord Jesus lived and died himself. And even if I or anyone else has a right to live off preaching the gospel, this is what I told the Corinthians, we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

[12 : 06] So let me be clear to this house here. Even if I am an apostle of Jesus, I am happy to lay aside my rights that get in the way of his good news going out.

How about you? Now it's not usual for maiden speeches to get personal, but let me share a little bit next about my own motivation for being a preacher.

Some of you know my back story. I used to boast in all my worldly achievements. I took pride in my upbringing, my lineage, my culture, my good grades at the fanciest schools, my zeal to be better than others.

I had no outward failures before God and yet my biggest sin was that all my successes went to my head instead of for God's glory.

I was all in with this selfish way of life. And you know that Christ showed up. He personally sent me as an apostle to you Gentiles.

[13 : 16] And because he personally called me, I see my ministry not just as a job description, a checklist, an obligation. My calling is a treasure, a taonga.

I'm entrusted with it. And this is now what I'm all in about. Jesus and the power of his resurrection. I'm all in to share his sufferings, to become like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

This is why I speak to you today. This is what gives me the greatest joy in serving you, not the title I have, not the paycheck I get. No likes and subscribes will compare.

What I told the Corinthians I tell you too. My reward as a preacher is that you hear about Jesus for free. Nothing I do or say will get in the way of this gospel as a free gift to you.

It's why I and others hold down a second job. You know how me and Barnabas, we make tents on the side.

[14 : 29] It's why we won't charge anyone to come hear us explain the gospel. Why this house will not charge to have our worship service or a small group or a course.

It's why we should never guilt trip people into serving or doing things just to feel they belong or to pressure our young ones to make decisions they don't truly mean.

That's no reward. And I hope we never become a house that favors some over others, gives more credit to the well-off, the well-connected and ignores others.

Our greatest strength will come from offering Christ freely without hindrance, will it not? And can I say to this house, those assembled here, if you have never received the gospel as a free gift, I want to offer it to you today.

As I said to the Corinthians, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. And so I can't offer killer jokes or amazing memes, but I can tell you good news of great joy.

[15 : 39] one is that God is the maker and ruler of this earth. He made us to rule over it. But secondly, we all have rejected God, have we not?

Trying to run life our way without Him. But then, God will not let us rebel like this forever. For treating Him and others so poorly, we deserve death and judgment.

But because of His great love, God, He sent His Son into our world. Jesus, who lived perfectly under God's rule and who willingly dies on the cross to bear the punishment for our rebellion, our sin, that we deserve that punishment.

And God brings forgiveness to us that we don't deserve for all our failures. And Jesus rose again from the dead. We know that. We can see His empty tomb.

We know that Jesus conquers death just as He can forgive our sins. He can give new life to you if you want it. He will return to judge if you avoid Him.

[16 : 49] And that means each of us have two ways to live. Our old way of rejecting God and His rule over us that leads to death. Or, God's new way of submitting to Jesus Christ as our ruler, relying on His death and resurrection as our hope for full forgiveness and eternal life.

Do you believe this? I do. As I said to others before, I am the worst sinner I know. And Christ is the best Savior I know.

That's good news. If you believe this in your heart today, you can respond even, telling this to God, submitting to Jesus, trusting Him, and you will be saved. Mrs. Speaker, I've made my defense.

I've shared my motivation to everyone as an apostle. I hope it clears up all the rumors that have been flying around from the Corinthians, from others, about my ministry. But before I get back on my ship to first century Ephesus, can I share two ways that we, even in this house, can offer the gospel freely to our diverse community.

Firstly, like me, I hope we will cross cultures carefully so we can win souls for Christ. As we recited together, though I am free from all, I've made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

[18 : 25] Can I illustrate from my own experience, I'm thankful for my Jewish upbringing. But as a follower of Jesus, I now live under His law, the law of love. And yet, if it will help me to share the gospel to non-Christians, I am happy to speak in Jewish synagogues.

I am happy to sit through meetings in different languages. I am happy to give up certain foods or to gain a hearing for the gospel among my brothers and sisters, my kinsmen and women.

And then, when it helps, I will also live among the Gentiles, people not of my own culture. Eat how they eat, sit how they sit, wear what they wear, listen to their music, appreciate their culture, practice my gift of tongues.

Yet, let me be clear to this house what crossing cultures carefully is not. It's not changing the gospel message itself. That is, God has saved us from sin through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

It is not to deceive people into being someone that I'm not. It's not to sin with sinners. To the greedy, I don't become greedy. To the sexually immoral, I don't become sexually immoral.

[19 : 44] For that would destroy other people's faith, even disqualify ourselves if we fall into sin ourselves. Because I love these people, I want them to know Jesus.

And so my goal is not for them to be conformed on the outside, but transformed on the inside by grace through faith. So I might say to an NBA fan, something I heard just getting off the boat, I might share how Jesus Christ is the true MVP.

He offers a perfect box score that we could never attain ourselves. To someone suffering with depression, I could share about my own thorn in the flesh, how it's humbled me.

And we can remember how Jesus was a man of sorrows, acquainted with my grief too. as a preacher later in time from me will one day say, you must live with people to know their problems and live with God in order to solve them.

That is how I want to serve you like Christ, to serve others like Christ, to be all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. But Mr. Speaker, let me also say that I won't just cross cultures carefully, I will also discipline my body diligently to win souls for Christ Christ.

[21 : 08] No doubt next week you will hear more from your pastor. But perhaps I can borrow from your own history as a people here at PCBC. Here in a house like this I'm sure you have heard many beautiful speeches and hundreds of testimonies.

Yet we are mindful of those who gave beautiful speeches only to drift away. How tragic then if after preaching to others that we ourselves would become those who drift away.

So I will discipline my body as a gospel preacher diligently like an athlete, like a boxer, those from the games that are held near where the Corinthians live.

Those training for the next marathon, like them, I will keep the faith, fight the good fight, keep running in this gospel race, following Jesus, the author and perfecter, the pioneer.

When it comes to fighting immoral desires and keeping them under control, laziness and lust and pride and everything else, I will train hard, get CrossFit.

[22 : 19] If sin thrives when I'm on my own, I need help. I will ask my brother. You know Sostenes, you know Barnabas, all these others. I hang with them because they keep me accountable.

I'd rather beat my body into submission than fall into sin and disqualify myself from preaching good news. But that's just me. How about you?

After all, are we not in this house apostles too? Sent ones, sent to preach good news to a dying world? I want to present the gospel without obstacle, so I will strive for holiness.

Will you? For the sake of the gospel, to see lives transformed in Christ, will you too deny yourself, take up the cross and follow Jesus?

This is the work today that I'm committing myself to before this house. I hope my example will help you all today to also surrender your rights for the sake of the gospel.

[23 : 21] And if there will be praise and glory that comes from my ministry, let it be a testimony to my maker and king. I am Paul and I freely lay down my rights to glorify my maker.

Ihu Karaiti. No reira. T■na koutou. T■na koutou. T■na koutou i tenei. Ahi ahi. Thank you. Good evening. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, Lord, we thank you. We thank you that Christ is enough for us, whatever our situation.

We thank you for your word which is life to us. We thank you that though we are weak and frail, many times we feel we don't match up to the standards of others around us.

Yet we know that following you is what truly matters. So would you mould and shape our lives, show us truly what it looks like to imitate the likeness of Christ.

[24 : 22] We thank you for those around us, those through church history who show us what it's like to live for Christ, knowing that death is gain in Him. and would you challenge us, help us give up any part of our lives where we have not surrendered wholly to you.

Even now I ask you root out unconfessed sin, areas of places in our lives where we'd rather hide it from God, from you.

You know it all. So work in our hearts, search us, our Lord, see if there's any offensive way in us, help us look to Christ and see life everlasting in Him.

We pray these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.