

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

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Introduction: There was correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian Church about which we have no record. Apparently, in a letter which we do not have, the Corinthians had written to Paul asking him to address certain concerns. Beginning in Chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians Paul begins to answer the questions the Corinthian Elders had addressed to him as an Apostle. Chapter 8 concerned the issue of eating food which was offered to idols. In Chapter 9, Paul gives an example from his personal life to illustrate the principle he has given in chapter 8:13 related to eating meat offered to idols. That principle is, “if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.”

1 Corinthians 9:1-14

Verses 1-3

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? ² Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

³ This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me.

- At first glance, Paul seems to be defending himself against those who argue that he had not been with Jesus while Jesus was on earth in human form and so he is not qualified for the office of Apostle.
- He says that the Christians in Corinth should have no reason to argue his Apostleship because he has worked among them personally and their salvation proves his claim. They have come to Jesus through his ministry.

Verses 4-6

⁴ Don't we have the right to food and drink? ⁵ Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living?

- Paul claims to have a right to all the benefits of the office of Apostle. The same rights that are extended to all the others who hold this office.

Verses 7-12a

⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? ⁸ Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ¹² If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?

- Paul argues that a soldier does not serve at his own expense, the vine keeper eats the grapes, and the shepherd drinks the milk that comes from the goats. In each case, the person benefits from the fruit of his own labor.
- He claims that the Law of Moses defends this principle (see Deuteronomy 25:4).
- Paul's argument that his service among the Corinthians in bringing them to know Jesus, gives him the right to expect benefits from them. They should be willing to pay the preacher.

Verses 12b-14

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

¹³ Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

- Paul points out that he did not insist on any of these things that were his by right because he did not want to do anything that would cause a brother to stumble.
- Even though Jesus commanded that those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from preaching the Gospel, and the Levitical Priests were supported by the Temple, he did not insist on what was his by right in

order not to cause a brother to stumble. After all, some brothers were arguing that he was not an Apostle. He did not want to cause more trouble by insisting on his rights. This is the principle laid down in 1 Corinthians 8:13.

- But still, the church should pay the preacher.

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