



(For access to all available commentaries and sermons of Charlie's click [HERE](#))

1 Corinthians

Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?

1 Corinthians 9:6

This verse is not actually a new thought which is submitted to the Corinthians, but the completion of the series of questions which began in verse 4. Though stated as questions, they are rhetorical in nature and are to be taken as affirmative statements... "I and Barnabas have a right to earn a living from our preaching." By asking it rhetorically after having given the evidences of his apostleship though, he is merely showing the ridiculous nature of the situation.

There was seemingly, however, a group that felt that Paul and his ministry wasn't actually worthy of being supported by the church. It probably goes to the decision rendered in Galatians 2:9, 10 which reads thus -

"James, Cephas, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along."

Maybe it was believed that because Paul was "only" sent to the Gentiles, he wasn't worthy of support. However, as history has borne out, his ministry and letters have been far more productive in establishing the church than all the other letters combined. His words have comprised the main doctrine of the church for nearly 2000 years. Despite this, and despite the true apostolic ministry that he had, he continued to support himself and work for a living.

It is known from Acts 18:13 that he was a tentmaker by trade. In this, he worked to support himself. The Greek word for "working" is *ergazesthai* and it indicates manual labor. Despite his tireless efforts in sharing the gospel, he was a man of physical labors as well.

One final note on this verse is that this is the last time Barnabas is mentioned in Scripture. The previous mentioning of him was in Acts 15. In that account, Paul and Barnabas had a great dispute about a matter which caused them to almost come to blows. They divided at that time, and there is no record of them having met up again. However, it appears from this verse that Barnabas took Paul's example of working for a living to heart and continued to follow this pattern in his own ministry.

Life application: There is nothing wrong with good hard work. In fact, the pastor who gets out and tends to the church grounds, works around his house, or works physically in some other way will be a positive example to those in the church to not sit around collecting welfare or other charity when they are fully capable of earning their own way. The Bible says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." In this verse, the same word for work, *ergazesthai*, is used which was used by Paul 1 Corinthians 9:6. Don't be a sluggard. Rather, if your physical makeup and the economy around you allows it, be productive with your hands, not causing others to support you when you are fully capable of earning a living.

Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?
1 Corinthians 9:7

Paul now continues with three more questions which are rhetorical in nature. Each demands a response of "Nobody!" He begins with warriors. "Who ever goes to war at his own expense?" Do those who fight the battles for king and country do so at their own expense? No. Instead, they are fed, clothed, and paid by whoever they are fighting for. Even those who are mercenaries fight for pay by the power who has hired them.

If a soldier who is enlisted to take life is so paid for his service, how much more then should a soldier who is sent out to preserve life be paid for the warfare he wages. And Paul equates the ministry of Christ to an on-going battle. In Ephesians 6, he notes that, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:12, 13).

Likewise, in 1 Timothy 1:18, he notes this to his beloved protégé - "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare." The lesson from this is that the soldier of Christ should, in fact, be paid for his services by the church for whom he wages war.

Next he asks, "Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit?" Again, the question demands an answer that the vinedresser does partake of the fruit of the vine. It is right and expected that he should do so. In the very first such example of the planting of a vineyard in the Bible, this is noted -

"And Noah began *to be* a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk..." Genesis 9:20

Noah not only planted a vineyard, he also enjoyed the benefit of what the vineyard produced. Regardless of whether one finds fault in him getting drunk, the fact is that he partook of his vineyard. Later, in the Law itself and certainly the verse to which Paul is speaking, Moses notes these points to the people of Israel prior to their entry into the land of Canaan -

"Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying: 'What man *is there* who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. Also what man *is there* who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it? Let him go and return to his

house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. And what man *is there* who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.'" Deuteronomy 20:5-7

Again as he did concerning the warrior, Paul equates those who labor for Christ as "farmers." In 2 Timothy 2:6, he shows that the expectation is that the spiritual farmer should be allowed to participate in the benefits of the harvest in which he labors, when he says, "The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops." The lesson from this is that the one who works in Christ's field should be paid for his services by the church for whom he farms.

In his third question, he asks about the flocks of the field - "Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?" Again, the answer is that those who do so certainly partake of their efforts. Under the law, the tithe of the flocks and herds were taken to where the temple stood and they were eaten by the giver after they were sacrificed. This is found in Deuteronomy chapter 12 –

"There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you." Deuteronomy 12:6, 7

As before, the work of those in the leadership positions in the church is equated to that of the shepherd. In Acts 20:28, Paul states this to the leaders in Ephesus -

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Peter uses the shepherd terminology again in 1 Peter 5:2. Thus, the lesson from this is that the one who tends to Christ's flock should be paid for his services by the church for whom he shepherds. From these three examples, Paul clearly defends the principle that it is not out of the ordinary for the one in leadership to expect to receive the benefit of his labors directly from the church.

Life application: In today's world, it is common for pastors and other clergy to be paid for their services. This is right and appropriate. However, it was never intended for people in such positions to be paid extravagant amounts. Those who have jet planes, million-dollar mansions, and flashy clothing and jewelry make a mockery of the humble, hard-working lives of the apostles who established the church. If your pastor lives a life of flash and pomp, you should find another pastor in more Bible-centered church.

Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same also?

1 Corinthians 9:8

After defending his apostleship, Paul has been asking rhetorical questions to bolster his rights as an apostle. He is entitled to partake of the benefits of being an apostle whether he exercises those rights or not. It can be inferred that because he didn't exercise them, others were using it as evidence that he really wasn't an apostle.

Because of his apostleship to the gentiles, there was certainly a dislike of his status among those who argued that the gospel was for the Jews, or at least for those who held to the law of Moses. That issue was resolved at the Council of Jerusalem, but it didn't change the hearts and minds of those in the legalistic faction of Judaizers. In fact, it hasn't changed them today, 2000 years later. Regardless of this, Paul's apostleship was valid and he was entitled to the rights and benefits of it.

In order to bolster this, especially in the eyes of those who held to Scripture (meaning what is now called the Old Testament), he will appeal to Scripture itself.

He uses this particular formula abundantly in his letters. Instead of relying merely on human reasoning, Scripture will support his claims. In this verse, he uses two separate words to intensify what he is relaying. In his comment "do I say," the verb is *lalo*. In the comment "does not the law say" the verb is *legei*. The first word, *lalo*, is a general word; as a mere man. The second word, *legei*, is a more distinguished word; from Scripture itself.

Life application: Paul's argument from human reason is bolstered and intensified when it is combined with the very words of Scripture. This is an extremely useful point to consider and remember. Defending the faith from science and philosophy is a wonderful way to get people to consider the workings of God. However, only Scripture can specifically bring a person to salvation. One who relies on Scripture first for their worldview will always have a better understanding of the issues which surround us, be they morality, Zionism, the nature of God, or a plethora of other things that swirl around us from day to day.

For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? 1 Corinthians 9:9

In his words of 1 Corinthians 9:9, Paul uses a common rabbinical technique known as *kal va-khomer* (from light to heavy) to argue his case. It is an argument as Chabad describes "whereby a conclusion is drawn from a minor premise or more lenient condition ("light") to a major or more strict one ("weighty") or vice versa, a fortiori argument. In common parlance, 'all the more so.'"

He has, for the past several verses, been arguing for the case that he bears all the rights of an apostle. In order to bolster that argument in a way which the "judaizers" could not honestly refute, he turns to the very source of their claims for their laws, traditions, and heritage - the Law of Moses. There, within the law are written the words, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." This is stated in Deuteronomy 25:4.

The idea is that to muzzle an ox, who is participating in the labors of treading out the grain in order to separate the grain from the chaff, would show a disrespect for the laborer, even if it were a mere ox. Muzzling involved tying its mouth closed in one way or another or even placing a basket over its mouth so that it couldn't eat the grain, thus depriving it of the food that was in its eyesight. It showed a coldness of heart towards the brute beast that was unacceptable in the eyes of God.

Paul then asks, "Is it oxen God is concerned about?" The answer is two-fold. First, "Yes, God cares about the oxen or he wouldn't have placed the admonition in the law in the first place." For this to be prescribed showed that God did, in fact, care for the oxen. He showed the same care for the animals of Nineveh when speaking to Jonah. At the very end of the book, these final words are noted -

"You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?" Jonah 4:10, 11

However, in making his *kal va-khomer*, or "light to heavy" argument, Paul shows that though God did care for the ox, he displays more care for man, His highest creature. This is with all certainty (though Paul doesn't explain it here) because bordering the curious verse about muzzling the ox are examples of care for His people. Deuteronomy 25:1-3 deals with the punishment of an offender of the law and the mercy he was to be given. No more than 40 lashes could be meted out lest, "he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight."

And then after the note about the ox comes more verses which concern the care of His people. Specifically, the rights of, and care for, the widow of a dead man. The principle of the ox then, even within the law itself, implies something of greater weight than the mere words initially seem to entail. God is showing care for the ox and yet, the implication is of greater care for His people.

The verse is of such importance to understanding the greater principle intended by the law that Paul repeats it in his first letter to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:18.

Life application: The Law of Moses, though set aside in Christ, contains valuable insights into God's relationship with, and desires for, His creatures. Because the Old Testament is so heavily cited in the New Testament, it is not truly possible to grasp the depth of New Testament revelation without understanding that of the Old. Don't be afraid to dig into the Old Testament... it won't bite you, but rather it will edify your understanding of God's redemptive plans for humanity.

Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. 1 Corinthians 9:10

This verse refers to the previous verse. Taken together, they read -

"Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same also? ⁹ For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.' Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope."

Paul's question concerning the words of Deuteronomy 25:4 is whether God intended to mean an ox, or was He rather making a spiritual picture of a *fortiori* argument. Is it "altogether for our sakes?" The answer immediately follows - "For our sakes, no doubt." The context of the verse, which is in the middle of other passages dealing with human matters, indicates that it was actually referring to a human matter as well. However, this does not exclude a literal meaning also. The word translated as "altogether" is *pantos*. Albert Barnes, after reviewing the nine uses of *pantos* in the New Testament concludes -

"The word here, therefore, means that the 'principle' stated in the law about the oxen was so broad and humane, that it might "certainly, surely, particularly" be regarded as applicable to the case under consideration."

And this is exactly what one should deduce when reading the law in Deuteronomy. The logical thought process should be something like: "God has said to not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. The law is intended for us to understand and consider God's heart for us. If God is concerned about a mere ox as it labors, then how much more is He concerned about us! If I have employees under me who labor for me, I should give greater care to them than the law requires me to give to my brute beast."

The man "who plows should plow in hope." The laborer shouldn't come home hungry after his day of work if he has been laboring in the processing of food all day. That would be an abuse of the bounty given to the one who hired the laborer. Likewise, "he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope." There are various ways to thresh grain depending on the type of grain. Isaiah explains this to us -

"For the black cummin is not threshed with a threshing sledge,
Nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cummin;
But the black cummin is beaten out with a stick,
And the cummin with a rod.
Bread *flour* must be ground;
Therefore he does not thresh it forever,
Break *it with* his cartwheel,
Or crush it *with* his horsemen.
This also comes from the LORD of hosts,
Who is wonderful in counsel *and* excellent in guidance." Isaiah 28:27-29

If an ox is not to be muzzled while it treads out the grain, then it logically follows that someone who beats out grain with a stick should also not be kept from partaking as he threshes. Therefore, the principle found in the law is God's way of protecting His creatures and keeping the hearts of His people from hardening

towards His laborers. It is an ingeniously placed passage in Deuteronomy which points to much more than it at first appears.

From this springboard, Paul will move from grains to the gospel.

Life application: The word given to us by God spans thousands of years of human existence and yet it coalesces into one whole, united, and understandable work of literature. The reason this is so is because God is the ultimate Author of its words. He carefully, methodically, and slowly revealed His heart to us through His word in order to show us our great need for Jesus. As you read the pages of the Bible, never stop looking for spiritual applications and pictures of Christ. You will be abundantly rewarded as you do.

If we have sown spiritual things for you, *is it* a great thing if we reap your material things? 1 Corinthians 9:11

Paul has been showing through the use of Deuteronomy 25:4 that the oxen which treaded out the grain is actually making a greater statement about the labors of people. If an oxen isn't to be kept from eating the grain he treads, then how much more should the human laborer be provided for through his efforts! He now transfers this thought directly to his apostleship, which he defended several verses ago as one shown to be valid and which actually was the means of transmitting the gospel to those in Corinth.

Because their coming to Christ came about through his efforts, then wasn't he entitled to be provided for through those efforts? In this reasoning, he states it from the greater to the lesser; from the spiritual to the material. This then is the opposite of the previous argument -

- 1) From the ox (lesser) to the human (greater).
- 2) From the spiritual (greater) to the material (lesser).

His words are "If we have sown spiritual things for you..." The "if" is to be taken as a statement of fact - "We have (definitely) sown spiritual things for you" (as he demonstrated earlier). Because of this, "*is it* a great thing if we reap your material things?" The question demands an answer that it is no great thing, but rather what would be expected. The ox was entitled, according to the law, to eat as he threshed. The context of the surrounding passage (and Paul's words of analysis concerning it) show that this naturally leads to the same entitlement for man in his labors. Therefore, it is no great thing to consider that those who minister in spiritual things should in fact reap in material things.

In both clauses, the "we" is emphatic, only bolstering the intent of his words, and the use of the word "great" involves a hint of sarcasm. He is showing very clearly that his apostleship is one which has been both helpful to them and deserving of their help to him in return. Despite this, Paul declined to accept such help from them. This will be seen as the chapter continues and the reason for it will be explained.

Life application: Paul says in Galatians 6:6, "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches." There is good reason for this. The one who teaches spiritually is providing the most valuable of all benefits to those he teaches (assuming the word is being properly handled and rightly divided). Is it then too much to return to the teacher something of benefit for his material profit?

Let him who is taught the word share

In all good things with him who teaches

For in that precious word, and only there

Is the found the true path to which heaven reaches

The one who so instructs has the most important duty

And the one who is instructed should so avow

*With gifts and offerings, a thankful booty
For spiritual instruction of the Who, the what, the how*

*For in learning the word, we learn of Jesus
And in Him is found the true and only heavenly path
It is His cross which has delivered us
From condemnation and God's holy wrath*

If others are partakers of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more?

Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. 1 Corinthians 9:12

After all the previous verses of chapter 9, Paul will begin to explain why he chose not to exercise his apostolic rights. Before he does though, he makes an obvious statement -

"If others are partakers of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more?"

He has spent seven verses showing how the rights of the one who labors include their entitlement to being supported by those they labor for. As this is a right which goes all the way back to the Law of Moses and which included brute beasts, it should be considered a universal axiom.

As it is, and because the other apostles used this right when visiting Corinth, weren't Paul and Barnabas even more entitled to using it? It was they who originally came and shared the gospel with them! In fact, Paul said to them that "you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (verse 3). Because of this undeniable fact, he was certainly entitled to the right of payment for his labors.

And yet, despite this certainty, Paul continues with "Nevertheless we have not used this right." This shows that Paul had an agenda other than profiting off of those in Corinth. If sharing the gospel was his passion and his life's main purpose, and yet he didn't earn his keep from it, then it showed a sincerity of heart that others should have recognized. If a person played major league baseball for nothing more than food money and a place to sleep, it would show a true love for the game. But when there are millions of dollars up for grabs, one can never really tell if the players are on the field for love of money or love of the game.

The same is true with televangelists. Just because someone has great oratory skills, doesn't mean that their love for Christ is sincere. Knowing that there are literally millions of dollars available to those who preach the gospel, along with fame, power over others, and Lear jets waiting in the hangar, one can't really be certain that Christ is the purpose for the preaching. Paul desired to avoid any such pitfall in the minds of those he ministered to. Instead he notes that they "endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ."

He was willing to go to great lengths and through any trials to share the gospel, even without exercising his rights as an apostle. The word translated "endure" is the Greek word *stegomen*. It means to cover closely (so as to keep water out). In essence, "to contain without leaking." The external pressures on a ship as it passes through heavy seas is immense. Such a test of the ship will show its true colors. If it survives such a beating, it is a worthy vessel to trust one's life with. Paul was showing to them that the message he preached was a worthy message; one in which another could trust with their eternal soul. There was nothing which could harm their fate, and Paul's willingness to suffer externally without cost or benefit was a demonstration of this.

The word for "hinder" is the Greek word *enkopēn*. It is only used here in the New Testament and it basically means an "incision" or a "cutting into." Hence Paul gives the idea of an impediment on a path which would interfere with following that path. If he were to come and lollygag around, eating food, schmoozing with the church, and expecting special treatment, those in the church could easily question his motives concerning the sharing of the gospel.

He wanted no such thing to occur, and so he worked diligently and without charge to share the wondrous message which had been entrusted to him.

Life application: About the secrets hidden inside each of us the Bible says -

"The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?" Jeremiah 17:9

Only the Lord can truly search out the heart of man. But our eyes should be used to evaluate those around us, particularly those in positions of power or leadership. It is a foolish thing to implicitly trust someone who acts in one way while speaking in another. If a leader were to spend all of his time on the golf course while telling others about the importance of work, it would show a corruption of the heart which was obvious. Likewise if that leader's wife were to tell those around her to only eat certain foods she deemed healthy and yet she was often seen eating foods which weren't on that list, it would show the corrupt and twisted thinking of a person who merely wanted control over others. In such cases, evaluating the actions would show the heart of the person. Let us reasonably evaluate our leaders, both in the church and elsewhere, and not blindly follow them because they have fine speaking abilities or some other highly noticeable trait.

Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat *of the things of the temple*, and those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings of the altar*? 1 Corinthians 9:13

From verse 4 until verse 12, Paul meticulously demonstrated that those who labor should receive compensation for their labors. Then in verse 12, he switched his comments to note that "we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ." He has moved from general labor to the specific labor, meaning work for Christ. Now in verse 13, he shows that those who labored for the Lord in the Old Testament received compensation for their efforts.

This move is to further bolster his previous comments about the rights of an apostle and how they should be entitled to support from the ministry. And so he again reaches back to the mandates of the Old Testament law. One of the twelve tribes, Levi, was set apart for ministering to the people. Within this tribe one group, the sons of Aaron, were called to the priesthood. In return for these mandated services, they were supported through the sacrifices and offerings of the people of Israel.

The first portion of his question deals with the Levites - "Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of *the things* of the temple?" Whether they knew this or not before Paul asked them, they knew it to be true now. The question is a rhetorical one and indicates that they do in fact eat those things. Likewise he asks if they also knew that "those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings* of the altar." This portion concerns the priests of Israel who, in fact, partook of those things.

There are numerous verses in the Old Testament law which so provided for the Levites and priests. Every third year, the Levites received the tithes of the people as a portion of their wages. From this a tithe went to the priests. When animal or grain sacrifices and offerings were brought to the temple, depending on the type presented, a portion may have been taken and given to them for their sustenance. When an animal was so sacrificed, the law even provided that the skins of the animal were to be given to the priests as payment. These could be sold for clothing, tents, parchments, etc. (This is found in Leviticus 7:8).

In all, the answer to Paul's question is that those who so minister and those who so serve do in fact benefit directly from their work. Using this line of reasoning from the Mosaic Law, he will next show that the Lord Himself directed something similar for those who share in the gospel.

Life application: Paul's words, though seeming to flip back and forth, actually form a well thought out progression. In following how he presents an argument and then defends it, we can learn also how to defend the tenets of the faith. There is nothing wrong with using Old Testament concepts for such a defense if those

concepts carry through logically to the New Testament. However, we must be careful to not arbitrarily apply or claim verses from the Old Testament which actually have no relevance to a New Testament concept. Care then needs to be taken in how one approaches concepts and prescriptions found in the Old Testament.

As the years pass by we grow in knowledge

We change from children into young adults

We move through school years and may head off to college

And we learn in life from mistakes and from faults

Eventually though we to a certain point age

Where we start to lose some of the things we once knew

Our memories fade, whether a professor or a sage

And sooner or later our time here on earth is through

But You, O God, are from everlasting to everlasting

In You is a sure hope to have life anew

And so to You our eyes and our hopes we are a'casting

For the wondrous resurrection and eternal days with You