

4.2 What Then is My Reward?

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- [0 : 0 0] We are going to turn to our Bibles and to our reading for this evening, 1 Corinthians chapter 9. Josh is going to be preaching to us in a moment, and last time we looked at chapter 8, and I'm going to continue, pick up the reading, the last verse of chapter 8 at verse 13, and then read right the way through chapter 9.
- So 1 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 13. Therefore, says Paul, Am I not free?
- Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I'm not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.
- This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?
- Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit?
- [1 : 2 5] Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the law say the same? For it's written in the law of Moses, You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.
- Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope, and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.
- If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?
- Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than but an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.
- Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple? And those who serve at the altar, they share in the sacrificial offerings.
- [2 : 3 0] And the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. But I've made no use of any of these rights, and nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision.
- For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting.
- For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward. But not of my own will, I'm still entrusted with a stewardship.
- What then is my reward? That in my preaching, I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.
- For though I am free from all, I've made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews, I became as a Jew in order to win Jews.

[3 : 42] To those under the law, I became as one under the law, although not being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law, not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those outside the law.

To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak. I've become all things to all people, that by all means, I might save some.

I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race, all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize, so run that you may obtain it.

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly.

I do not box as one beating the air, but I discipline my body. And I keep it under control. As after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified.

[5 : 03] Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, do grab your Bibles again at home and open them up to 1 Corinthians chapter 9.

You don't have to look far to find books or conferences that claim to have the ministry equivalent of the silver bullet.

Follow our methodology, our pattern of ministry, and you will see your church grow. If only you adopt these four principles, you'll see people flood into membership of your church.

Whoa. Who doesn't want that? Well, this chapter that we have before us this evening is all about Paul's pattern of ministry. And to the Corinthians, the only way it resembles anything like a silver bullet would be if you put that bullet into a gun and shoot yourself in the foot.

I don't think it would be overstating to say that the Corinthians detest Paul's way of doing ministry. How feeble, how fickle they think.

[6 : 11] But for Paul, it is about far more than just being effective in his ministry. It isn't about pragmatism. There is a far greater privilege and prize at stake.

Now, the first half of this chapter is taken up with possibly the most in-depth argument in the Bible as to the proper pay and provision from ministers. It's not very British to talk about money, is it?

But fortunately, this argument is not really here to encourage us to think about a pay rise for the staff. That would be awkward. But Paul argues in all kinds of ways in the first 14 verses that it is absolutely his right to be paid by those who've received his ministry.

But here's the irony. Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to pay him. He relinquishes that right. And more than that, the Corinthians have no problem with the idea of paying their ministers.

So the question comes, why on earth does he have to argue this at all? And the answer is that the issue isn't really about money. Just like last week, wasn't really about food offered to idols.

[7 : 24] Remember how Paul finished chapter 8? If food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat. The Corinthians think that is utterly supine.

What kind of apostle is influenced in what he does by the weak? And so Paul goes straight from his claim that he will never eat meat again to dealing with the derision that will come his way for such a decision.

Chapter 9 is Paul's defense about how he does things. That's what he says in verse 3. This is my defense. But Paul isn't so much defending the fact that he's an apostle, but rather he's defending his way of carrying out his apostleship.

And so let's see first in verses 1 to 14, a promised payment. A promised payment. In God's good design, his people have many very real rights.

And one of those for gospel ministers is to be paid by their parishioners. Owing to the questions over how on earth an apostle could be so unprincipled as to bend to the weak, Paul begins verse 1, am I not free?

[8 : 42] Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Of course, the answer to all of these things is that he has. Or that he is. Verse 2, other people might be able to question that, but you Corinthians, you can't.

You're the seal of my apostleship. You wouldn't be a church if I wasn't an apostle. And so from here, he piles up the arguments that support his rights to be paid as an apostle.

I count five of them. The first one, verses 5 and 6, he argues the other apostles are supported. They can afford to take a wife. They don't have to work on the side to feed themselves.

Second argument, verse 7, what's the way that the world works? Soldiers are kept in order to fight. They don't go away to fight and alongside work at Sainsbury's to keep themselves.

That's the same for farmers, isn't it? They enjoy some of their own crop. Third, verses 8 to 11, the law provides for it.

[9 : 51] This isn't just Paul's whim that he decides he should be paid. No, the law of Moses has always made provision for this very thing. Verse 9, even the ox is provided for in its labor.

The lowly ox. Don't muzzle it. Don't starve it. Let it feed as it works. And verse 10, isn't God far more concerned with his people, with his ministers, than an ox?

So how much more then should they receive from their work? If they've sown spiritual things, is it too much to reap material things?

Fourth, verse 12, the Corinthians ought to know it. Others share the same claim on them. So doesn't Paul even more?

If they're happy to pay other preachers, then they must certainly be prepared to pay Paul. After all, he is the apostle who planted the gospel amongst them. And fifth and finally, verses 13 to 14, it's God's design which Jesus confirms.

[11 : 04] Verse 13, this is always how it has worked in the temple. There was always provision for the priests and those who served the nation of Israel in the temple worship.

And in the same way, Jesus commanded those who proclaim the gospel to get their living by it. It was only a couple of weeks ago that we were seeing that very thing in Matthew chapter 10.

The sign of the gospel being rejected in a town was when the disciples were not received and provided for. They weren't to take provision with them. Those who believed would look after Jesus' disciples.

Otherwise, they were to shake the dust off and leave. That's Paul's five-pronged argument. It's pretty comprehensive. And Corinth, of all people, should know Paul's legitimacy as an apostle and that that comes with very real rights.

God's design for the world is that his people, is that as his people, we will have all kinds of rights. And his design is that ministers of his gospel will be kept.

[12 : 10] Paul knows that. He doesn't not receive it because he's not due it. He knows he's due it, but he doesn't take it.

You see, there's something that Paul cherishes and prioritizes over and above that. And that's what's fleshed out in the rest of this passage. And so we see in verses 15 to 18 a very precious privilege.

A precious privilege. There is something that is far more attractive and valuable than receiving every penny we deserve, every preference delighted in, every principle of our freedom defended.

Paul has a job on his hands with the Corinthians. They love shoes of power. They love wit and wisdom. They're drawn to the impressive leaders and speakers. And Paul's challenge is that he needs to win them to his way and he needs to do so in a way that doesn't see them marvel at Paul.

He can't just be the standout amongst a host of impressive leaders. If he woos them, if he wins them to himself with oratory power and skill, then he's perpetuating the problem.

[13 : 25] They love that. They want that. They'll say, look at us. We are followers of Paul the powerful. Paul needs to win the Corinthians to his way by them seeing in him a genuine impression of the Lord Jesus.

Flick over very quickly to chapter 11, verse 1. That's why Paul finishes this whole argument on food offered to idols. Paul says, be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

Paul is very careful that the Corinthians will be all too familiar with his weakness. He doesn't hide it from them. Turn back to chapter 2, verse 3.

He says, I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. He doesn't hide it. And so to maintain this, Paul, verse 15, doesn't make use of his rights.

This isn't even one of those kind of conceited, oh, I couldn't possibly take your money and two minutes later, but my bank details are. He isn't seeking to secure that provision.

[14 : 42] Look at how striking his words are in verse 15. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground of boasting. Question.

What is Paul's boost? Well, the answer is most certainly not his preaching. This isn't about his ability or freedom to preach, verse 16 and 17.

Paul makes clear that he has no choice but to preach. He's an apostle. It's what he's been set aside and called by God to do. That's not something to boost in. It's not at his discretion as to whether he should or shouldn't.

Well, his boost is seen in verse 18. Paul's reward is that in his preaching he presents the gospel free of charge.

That is, he makes the gospel seem as free as it really is. This was important because Corinth was a city that loved its orators, speakers, preachers, people who could speak publicly with great eloquence and clarity, very unlike me.

[15 : 55] and the custom was that they would be rewarded by this, were rewarded for this by patrons. And so the better the speaker, the more the salary. And so the payment for speaking in Corinth acted as a kind of status symbol.

In the Corinthian mind, Paul was puny because he wasn't paid. he wouldn't take their money. He's argued in this chapter that he knows he's entitled to it, but he doesn't want that to be an obstacle to them seeing the gospel for what it really is.

It was important that Paul would never be seen as just another charlatan peddling the latest philosophy or yet another version of self-help. He wants the gospel to look and sound as free as it really is.

And he's willing to sacrifice greatly in order for that to be the case. All these other preachers were paid for in Corinth. They were so well paid they could keep wives, but not Paul.

Back in chapter 4, when we see the utter difference between the Corinthian ministry and Paul's, they're strong, he's weak, they're wise, he's foolish, and the rest. One of the things that Paul cites there to mark himself out is that to this present hour he hungers and thirsts, he's poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and he labors working with his own hands.

[17 : 28] A tent maker? Ugh! How common, how peasant-like. What can a tent maker contribute to sophisticated Corinth?

No, no. We'll pay for the best of the best. Paul slogs his guts out at great cost to show the gospel as free as it really is.

And he does so, verse 18, not making full use of his rights. What is Paul's precious privilege? What is his boost? What is his reward?

It's that he gets to be like Christ. Paul's pattern isn't just cross-shaped because that's what's effective for ministry. He rejoices for any and every instance of getting to walk in his Savior's footsteps.

steps. I will endure great cost if it makes the gospel clear, if it makes the gospel believed. And so, at the last day, is there any commendation greater than this?

[18 : 35] Well done, good and faithful servant. In your life, with your circumstances, you walked as my son would have walked.

You really were as Christ to those around you. Isn't that worth far more than our passing freedoms and all the entitlements in this life?

Paul certainly thinks so. Well, it's worth us pausing here to reflect on this and Alan is going to come and sing a song for us that will help us to ponder this precious privilege of Paul's.

He's going to sing All I Once Held Dear. All I Once Held Dear Built My Life Upon All this world You're my all, you're the best You're my joy, my righteousness

And I love you, Lord My heart's desire is to know you more To be found in you and known as yours To possess by faith what I could not earn Also passing gift of righteousness Knowing you, Jesus Knowing you, there is no greater thing You're my all, you're the best You're my joy, my righteousness And I love you, Lord Oh, to know the power of your risen life

[21 : 21] And to know you in your sufferings To become like you in your death, my Lord So with you to live and never die Knowing you, Jesus Knowing you, there is no greater thing You're my all, you're the best You're my joy, my righteousness And I love you, Lord Love you, Lord Well, for Paul, alongside his privilege, he also has a priority

And that's what we see thirdly Verses 19 to 22 A priority to make us pliable A priority to make us pliable The unseen reality of heaven and hell Demands that all of our preferences Tastes and freedoms Are secondary to the battle for souls Paul bends all over the place To make the gospel clearer For the people he's ministering to That's his great priority here Look at verse 19 He says that I might win more Verse 20 That I might win those under the law Verse 21 That I might win those outside the law Verse 22 That by all means I might save some That's his priority So verse 19 Though Paul is free from all He has made himself Though Paul is free from all

He has made himself a servant to all Or more literally Though I'm free from all I have enslaved myself to all Paul accommodates himself To those who are in front of him Notice he doesn't accommodate the gospel He won't change that at all Verse 21 makes that clear He isn't outside Or above the law of God Paul's message and morality Is absolutely fixed He doesn't determine these He's a steward He's an apostle He can't and won't change these things But Anything else is up for grabs These days the phrase To be all things to all men Is a very negative statement It's the sort of thing we would say About spineless politicians But for Paul Being all things to all people Means being cross shaped He's saying that my preferences My tastes My wants

My rights Are up for grabs When it comes to the gospel Paul is Christ's chameleon
Anything social or cultural Or material is up for grabs And so in a sense The things that
he's flexible on Aren't the things that have a fixed Yes or no In God's grand plans for the
world They're the things that we might have Strong feelings on Things that are important
to us Whether it's insisting that People conform to our British manners Or that we must be
a vegan Or must not be a vegan Or that Scotland Should be independent Or that Scotland
Remains part of the union We're free to have our Own preferences And all these things
But when it comes to it How tightly do we hold on?

If the most passionate We're ever seen to be About something Is when we're arguing The
case for the union In the staff room Then what does that say To our colleagues We're
trying to witness to?

[25 : 35] How does that square With our claim That Christ is ultimate? Or with our kids? What is
immovable In our families?

Is it the gospel's message And morality? Or is it that Plus some other things? Or is it even
that at all That is seen in parents As immovable?

Now We mustn't minimize The cost here It can be very costly For us to relinquish Our
rights And our freedoms But that's actually The point What did it cost Paul To not take The
Corinthians money?

He had to squeeze in Beside his ministry The hard smelly work Of making tents Out of
leather What did it cost Christ?

It is costly And We live in a world That is obsessed With rights So what a powerful
Testimony it will be To lay those down To say actually Above all else What I care about Is
that you knew Christ Paul will willingly appear As one who has No preferences at all If it
would in any way See the gospel Made clearer and believed When he's with Jewish
people He bends in their direction With all these things If he has to leave ham Out of his
sandwiches For the picnic At the synagogue Then he'll do it If it allows him To read the
word One to one with them When he's with the Gentiles He bends to them If they're eating
A bacon cheeseburger He's eating it too We have to return To last week's example Of
alcohol Sometimes It will be important For a minister To never be seen With a beer in his
hands During the six nations Sometimes

[27 : 31] It will be important For a minister To be seen With a bottle of wine In a shopping trolley
The question is What will make The gospel clearer What will remove Any hindrance to it
Something else to notice Verse 20 Whilst Paul became As a Jew And verse 21 He
became As one outside the law Notice verse 22 Paul actually Became Weak That's How
the Corinthians See him But Paul is pleased To associate With the weak Paul is
absolutely On the side Of the weak Whether the issue Is food offered To idols Or whether
To have a pint What's most important The unseen reality Of heaven and hell That is what
Is most important We have great freedom

About all kinds Of things How to spend Our time We're free To fill our calendar With
church events We're free To fill it With time With our non-Christian Pals But the cross
Begs the question What will see The gospel Held on to Most clearly By those we know
And love That's not a black And white thing Perhaps some of us Will have to move More
in one way And others in the opposite With all of the Freedoms that we have What are we
prepared To let go of So that we can Be like Jesus Sacrificing ourselves Crucifying our
Interests and choices So that a world That is so lost And broken Might know Real and
lasting Hope That's Paul's Priority Nothing will get In the way of that But as well as

A precious privilege And his priority We see lastly In verses 23 To 27 That there's a Prize that he wants There's a prize That he longs for There's a prize At a price A prize At a price Our longing For the prize That awaits us At the last day Is what will Allow us to pursue This costly pattern Of Paul's ministry This costly pattern That's shaped After Christ's cross These verses At the end Of this chapter They aren't just Stuck on As a random Kind of afterthought Of course they aren't It is actually The very discipline The denial That's found Here That allows Paul to Forgo himself For the sake Of others Verse 23 He does all Of this For the gospel That he might Share with them Share with them In his blessings

These verses End with all kinds Of sporting analogies A runner An athlete A boxer And what is it That they all have In common? A single-minded Devotion To the prize Run That you may Obtain it The athlete Exercises Self-control Why?

To receive A wreath To be crowned The winner A boxer Doesn't aim Punches In any old Direction No they train To be precise In hitting the target And Paul Verse 27 Paul disciplines His body He keeps it Under control So that he Stays the course Holding on To our preferences Lightly Isn't just For the sake Of others It isn't just About preventing Obstacles To others Believing the gospel It's also For ourselves That's the Discipline Required To run The race We are free To do All kinds Of things But the Big warning Paul finishes This section 1 Corinthians On in chapter 10 Is that we Ought to be Very careful In thinking That we're Strong The Corinthians Needed to think About the impact Of going to The idol temple Would have On their weaker

[31 : 58] Brothers That was Chapter 8 Chapter 9 Paul defends His pattern Of ministry That's flexible For others Benefit And chapter 10 Warns that Going to the Idol temple Isn't as safe As you think It is And for us The truth is That all the Things in this World that are Morally neutral Are houses And cars Are jobs Are diets Are hobbies Are film choices Are political Persuasions Are beverage Choices Are entertainment Are money If these Things are Held on to In the Wrong way They can Corrupt us And disqualify Us When they Become so Dear to us That they Cloud our Vision of What is Essential Of what Is the Heart of Our Christian Faith When they Move From the Realm of Things that We enjoy To things That we Won't Do without Then they've Enslaved Us And when Push comes

To shove We will Struggle to Hold on To what Is immovable To the Message And morality Of the Gospel And so the Flexibility The sacrifice Of our Desires and Tastes for The gospel Are an Extension Of our Disciplining Ourselves to Not love This world More than The world To come But as A church Don't we Know that That is Worth it Wouldn't It be To our Shame If all The examples Of self Denial That our Friends and Family can Think of Are sportsmen Like in These verses And not Christians Think of Cristiano Ronaldo One of the Greatest Footballers Of all Time He has Been Unrelenting In his Quest to Be the Greatest Footballer He stays Late after Training He practices Free kicks For hours After everyone Else has Left He's Dedicated To the Task He's A physical

Monster An absolute Specimen Of a Human Being Through Dedication And denial What's the Best prize That he Can attain Verse 25 He's doing All that For a Perishable Reef And five Years time It'll be Someone else Whereas we Can be Assured that Every single Cost we put Up with Each sacrifice To be Loyal to Christ All that We give Up so That our Friends and Colleagues Receive the Gospel All of These Sacrifices Are for An Imperishable Crown An Imperishable Price One that Won't Fear or Spoil What then Is my Reward Something Far more Valuable Than a Silver Bullet It is That in This life We get To follow In the Footsteps

Of Christ That we Are like Him In every Instance Of Sacrifice And it Is that We will Be Raised With Him To All That Is Imperishable Let's Pray There's An old Poem That Reads Only One Life Will Soon Be Past Only What's Done For Christ Will Last And when I'm Dying How Happy I'll Be If The Lamp Of My Life Has Been Burned Out For Thee Lord Make It Our Delight To Embrace The Pattern Of The Cross On Any And All Parts Of Our Lives Loosen Our Grip On Even The Things That Are Very Precious To Us Here If They Might Rob Us Or Rob Those

Whom We Love Of Gaining You Help Us In This We Pray For We Ask It In Jesus Name
Amen