

The Church's Surrendered Bill of Rights

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Preacher: David Ely

[0 : 00] this. Well, we're going to read now in our Bibles, first of all in English, and then Saeed is going to come and read also in Farsi. We have no separate Farsi service this evening because it's communion, so we have some Farsi notes. If you need Farsi notes and you haven't yet got them, I'm not sure if everybody has them, then they are around. So maybe, Kerr out there, could you make sure that we have some and if there's anybody around.

Anybody not got the Farsi notes? Yeah, some guys over here still need the handouts. We're reading in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, and David Ely is going to be preaching to us from this passage this evening. And I'm going to read from just the very end of chapter 8, chapter 8 and verse 12. Now that's page 956. I think that's correct. 956 if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles. And Paul here is in part of a long discussion to the Corinthians about all sorts of issues. And if you scan the 8th chapter, you'll see it's very much about not wounding our Christian brothers and sisters. So he says in verse 12 of chapter 8, Sinning against your brother and wounding their conscience when it's weak, you sin against Christ.

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. 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 am 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 fruits? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority?

[2 : 22] 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 ploughmen should plough in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share in 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 put 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 share in the sacrificial offerings?

In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

Amen. May God bless to us. This is His Word. Yes. Bible story in high Jean 4 because of nine cont ■■■plies in high school, verse 1-14 from X000, verse 1.

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because you are the perfect of me through her Heaven. I've seen my face on my hands in Deus Animation. I've seen it's crucWest to change my God.

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[illegible]

I get what I deserve, no matter the cost. I will get my rights. Now this is a common sentiment, and even if we don't say it out loud, we feel it when we think that our rights are threatened.

But this is not a new thing. It isn't a quirk of our modern age. In fact, this sentiment was alive and well in Corinth, nearly 2,000 years ago.

And we can see it here in Paul's letter to the church there. In this letter, Paul is concerned about the behavior of the Corinthian Christians.

And one particular concern is how these Corinthians are acting in this area of rights. He is concerned that their behavior is laying out hurdles and obstacles in the way of the gospel.

Now in chapter 8, Paul has spent quite a long time dealing with this issue. And he has particularly used the example of eating food sacrificed to idols.

Some Corinthians had been eating such food. They were saying that idols had no real existence, and so a sacrifice to them meant nothing.

The meat was no different from any other meat. But this practice was causing other Christians to sin. Eating the meat may not have been wrong in itself, but it led others to stumble.

It caused them to trip up. It was getting in the way of the work of the gospel. The Corinthians believed they had a right to eat whatever food they wanted, but Paul wants them to see that even if this is true, they should be willing to give up that right for the sake of gospel work.

For the sake of the gospel, they should count that right as nothing. Now at first glance, Paul seems to move on to a completely new topic at the start of chapter 9.

But look ahead at the second half of verse 12. Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

We see here the same language of rights and obstacles that Paul has been using all the way through chapter 8. It seems that Paul isn't quite finished with this issue.

[9 : 12] In fact, here at the start of chapter 9, Paul is now supporting and expanding his argument from the previous chapter. And he does this using an example from his own ministry among them.

The Corinthians are causing problems by standing on all of their rights. But through his example, Paul aims to show them that this is not the way of the Christian life.

So let's take a closer look at his argument. From verse 1 to the first half of verse 12, Paul is making his first point. And his first point is this, that he has a legitimate right.

He has a legitimate right. So what right does Paul claim? Well, Paul and Barnabas have the right to material support.

Look at verses 4 to 6 and see what he claims. Paul says he has the right to food and drink. He has the right to bring a believing wife along with him.

[10 : 18] He has the right not to have to do other work for a living. Now, it is all very well Paul claiming these things.

But is it true? How legitimate is this claim? Does Paul really have the right to these things? Well, Paul now spends the best part of 12 verses making it absolutely clear that he does.

If his example is to have an impact, there needs to be no doubt that he really does have this right. Firstly, look at verses 1 and 2.

Paul says he is an apostle. And because Paul is their apostle, they can trust what he says to them here. Now, false teachers in Corinth have been claiming special insights.

But Paul's authority to teach comes from the Lord Jesus himself. Why should the Corinthians trust his words over the special knowledge of the false teachers?

[11 : 22] Well, because he is an apostle of Christ. And how can the Corinthians be sure he is an apostle? Well, the Corinthians themselves are proof of it.

Paul calls them his seal of apostleship. If you want to know if a tree is an apple tree or not, then look for apples. In a similar way, the Corinthians and their growth in the gospel are the fruit of Paul's apostleship.

They really can trust what he says. Paul's second defense of this right relates to what the Corinthians see all around them.

Who works at their own expense? Most people work because they expect to get paid for it. And Paul gives three basic examples.

Regular soldiers rarely fight for nothing. They expect to be rewarded for their work. Generally, they do not serve at their own expense.

[12 : 26] Likewise, the farmer doesn't plant a crop for the sake of it. They expect to get something out of it. They expect to eat some of the fruit. And even if they don't, they plan to sell the crop and feed themselves that way.

And which shepherd looks after sheep just because he likes sheep? He expects to receive some reward for it. But what about the other true gospel workers?

Did they expect some support? Or does Paul claim something here that no one else is claiming? Well, look at verses five and six. The other apostles seem to have rights.

Peter, the brothers of the Lord, and all the others are allowed to take along a believing wife. Why? Why should Paul and Barnabas be any different? Just by looking around them, the Corinthians can see that Paul has a real right.

But Paul goes further. Not only does the world around them prove he has this right, but the law of God itself upholds it.

[13 : 41] When he claims this right, he isn't just using human authority, but the authority of God. Look at verse nine. Paul quotes here directly from the book of Deuteronomy.

Moses commands that oxen should be allowed to eat some of the grain they are working. The ox should benefit from the work that it is doing.

And if the law applies to cows, how much more does it apply to us? Let me assure you, God is far more concerned for people than he is for cows.

So we begin to see now just how rightful Paul's claim for material support is. Not just because he is an apostle. It doesn't just stand on human authority, but ultimately because God himself has given workers this right.

Paul's line of argument here reaches a conclusion in verses 11 and 12. Look at these verses. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

[14 : 51] If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? In essence, Paul and Barnabas have sown a great thing in their lives.

They have sown the gospel. It is the work that they have done that is responsible for the new life the Corinthians have. Others who have served them deserve their wages, but Paul's work among them has achieved something far greater.

It has saved them. So how much more legitimate is their claim for support? All of this adds up to form a weighty argument.

Paul and Barnabas undoubtedly have a right to be provided for. There is no doubt about the strength of this claim. As much as anything is a right, this is one.

And the weight of this argument is what gives verse 12 its force. Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

[16 : 11] When we have seen how strong their claim is, we see the surprise of this verse. And this is Paul's second and main point. He has surrendered his right.

He has surrendered his right. Despite the complete legitimacy of their claim, Paul and Barnabas are willing to let go of it.

It may be their right, but they have not claimed it. And why? Well, this brings Paul back to the big point he has been trying to make throughout the preceding section.

They have not claimed this right so that there is no obstacle in the way of the gospel. Paul wanted his gospel work to be above reproach.

He wanted to make sure he couldn't be accused of seeking material gain. If he claimed this right, some may have lumped him in with the false teachers. These teachers were seeking to get rich from false teaching.

[17 : 15] And as a result, some people may have distrusted his words. The gospel work would be damaged. And this is the greatest of all Paul's concerns.

That the gospel will advance and bear fruit. The work of the gospel is his overwhelming priority. The Corinthians have been fixated on exercising all of their rights, which may have been legitimate rights.

But Paul is willing to give up any right for the sake of the gospel. Notice to what great lengths Paul is willing to go.

He says he would rather endure anything than damage the work of the gospel. And we know that these aren't empty words. When we look at Paul's ministry, we see that he really was willing to endure anything.

How different this is to the attitude of the Corinthians. They have been concerned about exercising all of their rights. Paul is concerned first and foremost about the progress of the gospel.

[18 : 31] Now, which of these attitudes is most similar to ours today? Outside the church, the attitude is overwhelmingly Corinthian. Rights are a big thing.

And it would be naive to think that society's attitudes don't creep into the church. Now, I must be very clear. Having rights is not a bad thing.

That is not what Paul is saying. He is not telling the Corinthians that people don't have rights. And he is not telling them to deny people their rights. In fact, he seems to say quite the opposite.

But Paul is warning the Corinthians away from prioritizing their own rights. Especially when these hinder the work of the gospel. As Christians, we need to hold our own rights loosely.

To give an example, Christians are free to drink alcohol. But imagine a young Christian student who is spending time with his unbelieving friends. His friends are drinking a lot of alcohol.

[19 : 35] Usually, he wouldn't think twice about drinking a beer or a glass of wine. After all, he has the right to these things. But in this case, he decides not to drink anything.

Why? Why does he choose to surrender his right in this case? Well, he knows that if his friends see him with any alcohol at all, they will assume he is drinking just as much as they are.

He wants them to see the distinctiveness of his Christian life. So to make the gospel as clear as possible, he holds his right loosely. Or for another example, think of how we respond when someone in the church hurts us.

What is our attitude when injustice has been done to us? We have the right to an apology or some form of justice. And for most of us, our natural reaction would be to stand on that right.

Even if we only do that internally. We want to make sure we get the justice we deserve. But perhaps, in many cases, and for the sake of the gospel, we should be willing to surrender this right to justice.

[20 : 50] We should be free with our forgiveness. The way we act towards one another either clarifies or confuses the gospel. And how we love one another within the church is a key part of our witness to Christ.

For the sake of the gospel, the Christian should be willing to give up his rights. And Paul's original example still stand.

In some situations, it may be right for a gospel worker to deny payment. Perhaps in a place where the prosperity gospel is proving to be a significant problem, associating true gospel ministry with money may damage the witness to Christ.

In such a scenario, the Christian should be willing to surrender his right. And in many places, what someone eats may still be very significant.

The Christian should be aware and should surrender their right to eat whatever they like. Perhaps a Christian seeks to reach Muslims. Of course, the Christian is allowed to eat anything they want.

[22 : 01] This includes eating pork. But eating pork would put a stumbling block in the way of the gospel. And so in this situation, it is good for the Christian to surrender their right to eat whatever they like.

And what about the example set for us by Paul's life and Paul's ministry? Paul had the right to physical safety and security. But for the sake of the gospel, he was willing to suffer.

He was willing to surrender his right to a safe life to make the gospel known. Look at his words in verse 12. He is willing to endure anything for the sake of the gospel.

Now at a basic level, we have the right to a physically safe life. Christians have this right. But to make the good news of Jesus Christ known, we should be willing to follow Paul's example.

For the sake of the gospel, we should be willing to endure anything, to surrender any right. After all, we are the followers of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 19] Jesus, who set aside more rights than any of us who ever could. who set aside all that he deserved to save us who were dead. Paul's resounding message is clear.

Christians, be ready to sacrifice any one of your rights for the sake of the gospel. in God's kingdom, needs have always come before rights and the greatest need is for people to hear the gospel clearly.

Otherwise, how will they come to believe and be saved? And how will they grow and bear fruit? This is Paul's big message to each of us.

Paul has built his case and brought home his point in verse 12. And we might be tempted to think that this is the end of the matter. But surprisingly, in verse 13, Paul briefly turns his attention back to the support of gospel workers.

And this brings us on to our third point, that the right still stands. The right still stands. Paul and Barnabas have not made use of this right They have not claimed any material support from the Corinthians.

[24 : 43] And Paul has made it very clear that any Christian should be willing to give up this and any other right if necessary. However, the right still stands.

Paul and Barnabas have chosen to surrender it, but they have chosen to be exceptions to a principle. The gospel worker should be provided for materially.

And if we don't believe it, we should reread verses 1 to 12. Paul and Barnabas have surrendered the right, but all of Paul's arguments still stand.

And if we have any doubt, Paul offers one more example. Those who work in the temple get their food from the temple. They share in the sacrificial offerings.

Once again, this was the God-given command of the law. This was established right at the start of Israel's history as a nation. As long as the temple system was in place, the priests had a share in the sacrifices.

[25 : 53] The generosity of God's people was to provide for the priests. And to make Paul's thoughts on the matter completely clear, we have verse 14.

The Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living from the gospel. Now we must be clear, the command is not to make gospel workers rich with great material gain.

It is to support them and their families so that they can commit their time wholly to proclaiming the gospel. Is that the attitude we take to our gospel workers?

We are rightly willing to pay a plumber for fixing a pipe, but are we hesitant to pay a preacher who brings the word of God? Words that can fix broken and sin-stained lives.

Now of course the principle here applies much more broadly than this. Christians should not stand on their rights when the gospel is at stake. But as the church we should make sure we don't abuse this godly attitude.

[27 : 00] For example, it is good for a Christian to give up Saturdays for the sake of gospel work. It is good to give up evenings for the sake of the gospel. Willingness to do this is a good thing.

But it is our responsibility as fellow believers to make sure that that willingness is not abused. Christians have a right to proper rest.

And under normal circumstances it is good that the church ensures this is met. Perhaps by giving up some of our own time so that other believers are not unfairly burdened.

And I'm sure there are many other examples you can see in the life of the church. Do you see the dual call in these verses? There is a clear call to each of us as individuals.

Be willing to surrender any of our own rights for the sake of the gospel. And then there is the call to make sure our brothers and sisters legitimate needs are met.

[28 : 06] We cannot surrender our brothers and sisters rights for them. We must take our responsibility seriously. So then, to sum up as we close.

Paul's message here is twofold. Every Christian should be willing to give up any right for the sake of the gospel. We must be willing to follow Paul's example.

Willing to endure anything instead of placing a stumbling block in the way of the gospel. nevertheless, the Lord has commanded that we support our gospel workers.

Rights do exist. And we should rejoice in meeting the needs of our brothers and sisters. Are we heeding this dual call? Are we holding our own rights loosely so that the gospel message is clear?

Are we willing to endure anything so that many might be saved? Are we neglecting our brothers and sisters? Are we abusing their sacrifice?

[29 : 14] Or are we taking seriously our responsibility to meet their real needs? As we do both these things, we bring glory to Christ and we point others to him.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the gospel that you have shared with us.

Thank you that your son laid down every right so that our sins might be forgiven. Thank you that he laid down every right so that we might be set free from slavery.

We thank you, Father, for the example of Paul. Help us to imitate him. Help us to be willing to surrender any right so that others might come to know Jesus Christ.

And help us to care deeply for each other. We pray that as your people, we will love one another deeply. Forgive us if we have abused the willingness and sacrifice of our brothers and sisters.

[30 : 22] In Jesus' name, Amen.