



PRODIGAL

CHURCH

SERIES: PRODIGAL CHURCH

DATE: SUNDAY, 20TH OF SEPTEMBER, 2020

SPEAKER: CRAIG VERNALL

SERMON TITLE: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 9

Nothing appears to be sacred within the young church of Corinth. Not even Paul's own ministry and credibility. In chapter 9, Paul is defending his rights as an apostle to have his needs met. As Paul describes what he believes to be his justified compensation, we quickly read that other apostles are being treated better than him.

The entertainment and lecture culture within Greek and Roman communities was built around the home. Usually the home of wealthy benefactors who would be the gathering place for guests to gather and listen to a philosopher speak or a singer sing or a travelling artisan showing their skills.

The only problem with this is that the poor missed out. So, it's within this tradition that Paul now carves out a place for himself and the gospel.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-5.

"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. 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?"

Q1. Why is it surprising that Paul is having to defend his credibility to those whom he's led to know Christ?

Q2. Is there something about human nature here that describes how fickle loyalty can be? How so?

Paul identifies the other apostles (the Lord's brothers and Peter) as being preferred guests who were well catered for and who's wives were also welcome. Clearly this respect was not given to Paul.

Q3. What could be some possible reasons for their contempt? Do you think that the contempt shown to Paul was because he was self-sufficient and always worked as he taught?

Below Paul now presents a reasonable defense of his rights to be looked after.

"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's defense is called a rhetorical argument. Paul doesn't expect an answer because the answer is self-evident. People work and are rewarded for their work.

Q4. Can you agree with Paul when he asks, "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?"

SEGUE:

On Sunday I spoke about the tradition of support for spiritual leaders that was built into the nation of Israel when they entered into their promised land. Numbers 18:20-24 describes how the Tribe of Levi was to serve as Priests for the nation. They did not inherit any land when the land was divided amongst the tribes of Israel. Instead, they were to receive a tithe of all the produce to support their families as they served in the temple.

Can you see how God wanted this system of support for spiritual leaders to be deeply embedded within the nations culture? This created a high functioning system of mutual interdependence.

Q5. Discuss what you see the result being within the community in Israel because of this system.

Paul has defended the rights of apostles to be rewarded for their work. However, Paul now describes and defends his choice to not take payment. Which seems very surprising given his strong argument to be paid. So, Paul must have a very significant reason for this. Let's read below.

"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.

¹⁵ But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. ¹⁶ For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel."

Q6. From what you've read above, why was Paul's boasting about not being paid something he didn't want to be deprived of?

Twenty first century church life is built around the goal of sharing the gospel at no expense to those who have not heard. It's the responsibility of the spiritually mature to support those called to lead so that others may hear the gospel. This support for the church leadership and the church's activities should create a very healthy environment for mission and community.

Q7. Discuss your thoughts on this.

In the passages below Paul further explains why his freedom from dependence on others is so important to him. Paul wants to answer to no one except God as he brings the gospel to those who he meets. The statement below is a description of very radical mission and evangelism.

PAUL'S USE OF HIS FREEDOM

"¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

Within the society of Corinth Paul identifies 3 people groups. The Jews, the Gentiles and those with a weak conscience. (As described in 1 Corinthians 8) Paul wants to relate to all of them. To do so, he's prepared to take radical and often controversial opportunities to share the gospel with everyone. *"I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."*

Q8. In what ways could each one of us take a leaf from Paul's playbook and position ourselves to share the Good News about Jesus?

NOTE:

I'm praying that this week we'll see the lifting of the Covid-19 restraints. I'm really looking forward to being together with everyone as we worship the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Every blessing, Pastor Craig