CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

1 Corinthians Chapter 9 — Paul's Rights, His Sacrifice, and His Discipline

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

1 Corinthians Chapter 9 can seem like a sudden change of subject.

In Chapter 8, Paul was talking about food offered to idols.

He ended with a personal decision:

“If what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again.”

Now, in Chapter 9, Paul shows that this was not just talk.

He had already given up far more than meat.

Chapter 9 is Paul's living example of the principle he taught in Chapter 8:

Love limits liberty.

Some in Corinth were questioning whether Paul was a true apostle.

After all, he did not accept money from them.

Other teachers did.

Maybe, they thought, Paul refused support because he knew he did not really deserve it.

Paul answers with a powerful defense.

He is an apostle.

He has seen the risen Lord.

The Corinthian church itself is proof of his ministry.

And as an apostle, he had every right to be supported.

Soldiers are paid.

Farmers eat their crops.

Shepherds drink the milk of their flock.

The Law of Moses says so.

The priests in the temple lived from the offerings.

And the Lord Jesus Himself commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

But Paul did not use this right.

Why?

So that nothing would hinder the gospel.

He made himself a servant to all.

He became all things to all people so that by all possible means he might save some.

Then Paul turns to a picture every Corinthian would understand.

Corinth hosted the famous Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympics.

Athletes trained hard, controlled their bodies, and ran to win.

And all for a crown that would wither in a few days.

Christians run for a crown that will last forever.

So they must run with purpose and discipline.

The chapter moves through five movements:

- Paul's Apostolic Authority (verses 1–3).
- The Rights of an Apostle (verses 4–14).
- Paul's Sacrificial Example (verses 15–18).
- Paul's Servanthood for the Gospel (verses 19–23).
- Running to Win the Prize (verses 24–27).

The central truth of 1 Corinthians 9 is:

For the sake of the gospel, Paul gladly gave up his rights, made himself a servant to all, and disciplined himself like an athlete, because winning people to Christ and receiving the eternal prize was worth any sacrifice.

I. AM I NOT AN APOSTLE?

1 Corinthians 9:1 — Four Questions

“Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not you my work in the Lord?”

Paul opens with four questions.

Each one expects the answer **“Yes!”**

“Am I not an apostle?”

Some in Corinth doubted Paul's authority.

But he was a true apostle, sent by Christ.

“Am I not free?”

Paul had just said he would give up meat for others.

That did not mean he was not free.

He was free.

He chose to limit his freedom out of love.

“Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?”

An apostle had to be a witness of the risen Christ.

Paul had seen Him on the road to Damascus.

“Are not you my work in the Lord?”

The Corinthian church itself was the fruit of Paul's ministry.

Cross References

Acts 9:17

> So Ananias went to the house and placed his hands on Saul. He said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so that you can see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Galatians 1:1

> Paul, an apostle—not sent by people or appointed by any man, but sent by Jesus Christ and by God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.

Acts 22:14

> Then he said, “The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know His will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear words from His own mouth.”

Spiritual Principle

True authority in ministry comes from Christ's call, not from human approval.

Key Truth

Paul was free.

That is what made his sacrifice meaningful.

II. THE SEAL OF MY APOSTLESHIP

1 Corinthians 9:2 — “Surely I Am to You”

“If I am not an apostle to others, yet surely I am to you: for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”

Paul makes a strong point.

Others might question whether he was an apostle.

But the Corinthians could not.

“You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”

A **seal** was a mark stamped in wax to prove that a document was genuine.

The church in Corinth was Paul's seal.

He came to their city.

He preached the gospel.

He stayed a year and a half teaching them.

And a church was born.

If they doubted Paul, they were doubting their own salvation.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 3:2

> You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone.

Acts 18:11

> So Paul stayed there for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

1 Corinthians 4:15

> Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. In Christ Jesus I became your father through the good news.

Spiritual Principle

Changed lives are the clearest proof of a genuine ministry.

Key Truth

The best letter of recommendation is a life transformed by the gospel.

III. MY DEFENSE

1 Corinthians 9:3 — To Those Who Examine Me

“My defense to those who examine me is this:”

Paul now begins a formal defense.

The word **defense** was used in a courtroom.

The word **examine** was used for a judge questioning someone.

Some in Corinth were putting Paul on trial.

They questioned his authority.

They questioned his motives.

They questioned why he refused their money.

Paul answers them.

But notice that his defense is not mainly about protecting himself.

It is about showing why he gave up his rights.

He is teaching the Corinthians by example.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 12:19

> Have you been thinking all along that we are defending ourselves to you? We are speaking in Christ before God. Everything we do, dear friends, is to build you up.

Philippians 1:7

> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart. Whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the good news, all of you share with me in God's grace.

1 Corinthians 4:3

> But it matters very little to me if I am judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself.

Spiritual Principle

When a servant of God must defend himself, the goal should be to build others up, not to protect his pride.

IV. THE RIGHT TO EAT AND DRINK

1 Corinthians 9:4 — Support for Ministry

“Do we not have the right to eat and to drink?”

Paul begins listing his rights.

The first is simple.

“The right to eat and to drink.”

This means the right to have food and drink provided by the churches he served.

It is the right to be supported in ministry.

Jesus taught this when He sent out His disciples.

He told them to accept the food and drink people gave them, because the worker deserves his pay.

Cross References

Luke 10:7

> Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, because the worker deserves his pay. Do not move from house to house.

1 Timothy 5:18

> For Scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his pay.”

Matthew 10:10

> Do not take a bag for the trip, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a walking stick, because the worker deserves his food.

Spiritual Principle

Those who serve in gospel ministry have a right to be supported.

V. THE RIGHT TO A BELIEVING WIFE

1 Corinthians 9:5 — Like the Other Apostles

"Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?"

Paul's second right was to have a **believing wife** travel with him.

And to have the churches support her as well.

Paul mentions three groups who did this.

The other apostles.

The brothers of the Lord—Jesus' half-brothers, such as James and Jude, who became believers after His resurrection.

Cephas—Peter, who was married.

Paul was single.

But even if he had married, he would have had the right to bring his wife and have the church support her.

This verse also shows that ministry and marriage go together well.

Many of the early church leaders were married.

Cross References

Matthew 8:14

> When Jesus came into Peter's house, He saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever.

Mark 1:30

> Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her right away.

Acts 1:14

> All of them joined together and kept praying, along with the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

Spiritual Principle

Marriage and family are honored in ministry.

Key Truth

Even Jesus' own brothers, who once doubted Him, became His servants.

VI. BARNABAS AND I

1 Corinthians 9:6 — Working to Support Themselves

“Or is it only Barnabas and I who must work to support ourselves?”

Paul's third right was the right **not** to work at another job.

Paul and Barnabas had chosen to work with their hands to support themselves.

Paul was a tentmaker.

But this was their choice, not an obligation.

Barnabas was a generous leader in the early church.

His name meant **“son of encouragement.”**

He was the one who first brought Paul to the apostles after Paul's conversion.

Together they went on the first missionary journey.

Later they had a sharp disagreement and went separate ways.

Yet here Paul speaks warmly of him.

They shared the same commitment to serve without being a burden.

Cross References

Acts 4:36

> Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”),

Acts 13:2

> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart Barnabas and Saul for Me, for the work I have called them to do.”

Acts 15:39

> They had such a sharp disagreement that they went their separate ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus,

Spiritual Principle

Choosing to give up a right is a different thing from not having it.

Key Truth

Paul and Barnabas once disagreed sharply.

But Paul still honored his old partner.

VII. SOLDIERS, FARMERS, AND SHEPHERDS

1 Corinthians 9:7 — Examples from Everyday Life

“Who serves as a soldier 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?”

Paul gives three examples from ordinary life.

The soldier.

No soldier pays his own way.

The army supports him.

The farmer.

No one plants a vineyard and refuses to eat the grapes.

The shepherd.

No shepherd tends a flock and refuses to drink its milk.

The point is simple.

Those who work have a right to benefit from their work.

The same is true of those who serve in ministry.

Notice that these three pictures are also pictures of ministry.

The minister is a soldier in the Lord's army.

He is a farmer planting the gospel.

He is a shepherd caring for God's flock.

Cross References

2 Timothy 2:4

> No soldier on duty gets tangled up in everyday affairs, because he wants to please the officer who enlisted him.

2 Timothy 2:6

> The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

Deuteronomy 20:6

> Has anyone planted a vineyard and not yet enjoyed its fruit? He should go home, or he might die in battle and someone else will enjoy it.

Spiritual Principle

Common sense and fairness both say that workers should share in the fruit of their labor.

VIII. DOES NOT THE LAW SAY THE SAME?

1 Corinthians 9:8 — More Than Human Reasoning

“Do I say this from a human point of view? Does not the Law say the same also?”

Paul does not want anyone to think he is only using human logic.

“Do I say this from a human point of view?”

The examples of soldiers and farmers are good.

But Paul has a stronger argument.

“Does not the Law say the same also?”

God's own word teaches this principle.

Paul always went back to Scripture.

Human reasoning can support a point.

But only God's word settles it.

Cross References

Romans 3:19

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Galatians 4:21

> Tell me, you who want to be under the law, don't you listen to what the law says?

Romans 7:1

> Brothers and sisters—I am speaking to people who know the law—don't you know that the law has authority over a person only as long as he lives?

Spiritual Principle

God's word, not human opinion, is the final authority.

Application

When you make a case for something, ask: **"What does Scripture say?"**

IX. DO NOT MUZZLE THE OX

1 Corinthians 9:9 — Is It for Oxen That God Is Concerned?

"For it is written in the Law of Moses: "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned?"

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4.

In Israel, oxen walked in circles over the harvested grain to separate the grain from the stalks.

God commanded that the ox must not be muzzled.

It should be free to eat some of the grain while it worked.

Then Paul asks:

"Is it for oxen that God is concerned?"

God does care for animals.

The Bible is clear about that.

But Paul's point is that this law had a deeper purpose.

If God cared that a working ox could eat, how much more does He care that His working servants are supported?

Cross References

Deuteronomy 25:4

> Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

1 Timothy 5:18

> For Scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his pay.”

Deuteronomy 22:10

> Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together.

Spiritual Principle

God's laws reveal His heart, and His heart is fair and generous toward those who work.

X. WRITTEN FOR OUR SAKE

1 Corinthians 9:10 — Plowing and Threshing in Hope

“Or does He not certainly speak for our sake? Yes, it was written for us—because the plowman should plow in hope, and the thresher should share in the harvest.”

Paul explains the deeper meaning.

“It was written for us.”

God's law about oxen teaches a principle for people.

The plowman should plow in hope.

He works now, expecting a harvest later.

The thresher should share in the harvest.

The one who does the work should benefit from it.

The Old Testament was not written only for ancient Israel.

It was written to teach God's people in every age.

Cross References

1 Timothy 5:18

> For Scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his pay.”

2 Timothy 2:6

> The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

Romans 15:4

> Everything written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Spiritual Principle

The Old Testament still teaches and encourages God's people today.

Key Truth

God's word speaks to every generation.

XI. SPIRITUAL SEED, MATERIAL HARVEST

1 Corinthians 9:11 — Is It Too Much?

“If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?”

Paul applies the principle to himself.

He had **sown spiritual things** in Corinth.

He brought them the gospel.

He taught them God's word.

He led them to eternal life.

Was it too much to expect **material things** in return—food, shelter, and support?

Spiritual blessings are worth far more than material ones.

Supporting those who bring us the word of God is only fair.

Cross References

Romans 15:27

> They were glad to do it, and they really owe it to them. Since the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to help them with material blessings.

Galatians 6:6

> The one who is taught the word should share all good things with the one who teaches him.

2 Corinthians 9:6

> Remember this: whoever plants only a few seeds will harvest only a little, and whoever plants generously will harvest generously.

Spiritual Principle

Those who receive spiritual blessings should gladly share material blessings.

Application

Do you support those who teach you God's word?

XII. WE HAVE NOT USED THIS RIGHT

1 Corinthians 9:12 — So That We Will Not Hinder the Gospel

“If others share this right over you, do not we more? Nevertheless, we have not used this right, but we endure all things so that we will not hinder the gospel of Christ.”

Other teachers in Corinth were accepting support.

Paul says he had even more right to it, since he founded the church.

Then comes the great turn:

“Nevertheless, we have not used this right.”

Paul chose not to take their money.

Instead, he would **“endure all things.”**

He would work hard, go hungry, and suffer hardship.

Why?

“So that we will not hinder the gospel of Christ.”

In Corinth, many traveling teachers spoke for money.

Paul did not want anyone to think he was one of them.

He did not want money to become an obstacle to the message.

Cross References

Acts 20:33

> I have not wanted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.

2 Corinthians 11:9

> When I was with you and needed something, I did not burden anyone. The believers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and I will continue to do so.

2 Corinthians 12:13

> How were you treated worse than the other churches, except that I never was a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

Spiritual Principle

Nothing we have is worth keeping if it hinders the gospel.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The gospel is more important than our rights.

XIII. THOSE WHO SERVE AT THE ALTAR

1 Corinthians 9:13 — The Example of the Temple

“Do you not know that those who minister at the temple eat from the temple offerings, and those who serve at the altar partake of what is offered on the altar?”

Paul gives another example.

In Israel, the priests and Levites did not own land.

They served in the temple.

And God provided for them from the offerings people brought.

They received part of the sacrifices as their food.

This was God's plan for supporting those who served Him.

The same principle was common even in pagan temples in Corinth.

Cross References

Leviticus 6:16

> Aaron and his sons will eat what is left of it. It must be eaten without yeast in a holy place, in the courtyard of the tent of meeting.

Numbers 18:8

> Then the LORD said to Aaron, “I have put you in charge of the offerings given to Me. All the holy gifts the Israelites give Me I have given to you and your sons as your share, a portion forever.”

Deuteronomy 18:1

> The Levitical priests—the whole tribe of Levi—will have no land of their own in Israel. They will live on the offerings made to the LORD by fire, which are their share.

Spiritual Principle

God has always provided for those who give their lives to serving Him.

XIV. THE LORD HAS COMMANDED

1 Corinthians 9:14 — Living from the Gospel

“In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”

Paul gives his final and strongest argument.

“The Lord has commanded.”

Jesus Himself taught this.

When He sent out His disciples, He told them that the worker deserves his pay.

So those who preach the gospel **“should live from the gospel.”**

This is the Lord's plan for supporting gospel ministry.

Paul has now given six reasons why he had the right to be supported:

- His apostleship.
- The example of the other apostles.
- Everyday life—soldiers, farmers, shepherds.
- The Law of Moses.
- The temple priests.
- The command of the Lord Jesus.

His right was beyond question.

Cross References

Luke 10:7

> Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, because the worker deserves his pay. Do not move from house to house.

Galatians 6:6

> The one who is taught the word should share all good things with the one who teaches him.

Matthew 10:10

> Do not take a bag for the trip, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a walking stick, because the worker deserves his food.

Spiritual Principle

Supporting gospel ministry is the Lord's command, not just a good idea.

Application

Supporting those who preach the gospel is an act of obedience to Christ.

XV. I HAVE USED NONE OF THESE RIGHTS

1 Corinthians 9:15 — Rather Die

“But I have used none of these rights. And I am not writing these things to suggest it should be done for me. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my boasting.”

After proving his right, Paul says:

“I have used none of these rights.”

And he makes clear he is not hinting for money.

“I am not writing these things to suggest it should be done for me.”

Then he says something very strong:

“I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my boasting.”

What was Paul's **boasting?**

Not pride in himself.

It was his joy in being able to preach the gospel free of charge.

He would rather die than lose that privilege.

Cross References

Acts 20:33

> I have not wanted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.

2 Corinthians 11:10

> As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, no one in the region of Achaia will stop me from boasting about this.

Philippians 3:7

> But whatever I once counted as gain, I now count as loss because of Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The joy of giving freely can be greater than the benefit of receiving.

Key Truth

Paul gave up his rights, not reluctantly, but gladly.

XVI. WOE TO ME

1 Corinthians 9:16 — Necessity Is Laid Upon Me

“For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since necessity is laid upon me; indeed, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”

Paul explains something important.

He cannot boast simply because he preaches.

Preaching was not his choice.

“Necessity is laid upon me.”

God had called him.

He had no option.

“Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”

Paul felt a holy compulsion.

Like Jeremiah, the word of God burned in his heart like fire.

He could not keep it in.

So preaching itself was not something to boast about.

It was simply obedience.

Cross References

Jeremiah 20:9

> But if I say, “I will not mention Him or speak in His name anymore,” His word burns in my heart like a fire shut up in my bones. I am worn out from holding it in. I cannot do it.

Romans 1:14

> I owe a debt to Greeks and non-Greeks, to the wise and the foolish.

Acts 4:20

> For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel is not a career; it is a calling.

Key Truth

Those who truly know Christ cannot stay silent about Him.

XVII. ENTRUSTED WITH A STEWARDSHIP

1 Corinthians 9:17 — Willingly or Unwillingly

“For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if unwillingly, I am still entrusted with a stewardship.”

Paul thinks about his calling.

“If I do this willingly, I have a reward.”

A person who chooses to serve might expect a reward.

“But if unwillingly, I am still entrusted with a stewardship.”

Paul did not choose this work.

God chose him.

He was like a steward or household manager given a job by his master.

A steward does not expect special pay for doing his duty.

He simply does what he was given to do.

Cross References

Luke 17:10

> So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants. We have only done our duty.”

1 Peter 4:10

> Each of you has received a gift. Use it to serve one another, as good managers of God's grace in its many forms.

Ephesians 3:2

> Surely you have heard about the responsibility God gave me to share His grace with you.

Spiritual Principle

Every believer is a steward of what God has entrusted to them.

Key Truth

Obedience is our duty, not our achievement.

XVIII. WHAT THEN IS MY REWARD?

1 Corinthians 9:18 — Free of Charge

“What then is my reward? That when I preach the gospel, I may offer it free of charge, so as not to misuse my rights in the gospel.”

If preaching itself is Paul's duty, what is his reward?

“That when I preach the gospel, I may offer it free of charge.”

Paul's reward was the joy of giving the gospel away freely.

He did not have to preach for free.

That part was his choice.

And it brought him deep joy.

God gave the gospel to Paul freely.

Paul wanted to give it to others the same way.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:7

> Was it wrong for me to humble myself so that you could be lifted up, by preaching God's good news to you free of charge?

2 Corinthians 12:14

> Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you. I don't want what you have—I want you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.

Acts 18:3

> Because Paul was a tentmaker just as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

Spiritual Principle

The greatest reward in serving God is often the joy of serving itself.

Application

What could you do for the Lord that goes beyond what is required?

XIX. A SERVANT TO ALL

1 Corinthians 9:19 — That I Might Win More

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more.”

Here is the heart of the chapter.

“Though I am free from all men.”

Paul owed no one anything.

He was not under anyone's control.

“I have made myself a servant to all.”

The word is **slave.**

Paul freely made himself everyone's slave.

He gave up his comfort, his preferences, and his rights.

Why?

“That I might win more.”

Paul's goal was to win people to Christ.

He would do anything, short of sin, to remove barriers between people and the gospel.

This is the example of Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve.

Cross References

Galatians 5:13

> Brothers and sisters, you were called to be free. But do not use your freedom as an excuse to please your sinful nature. Instead, serve one another in love.

Mark 10:44

> and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of everyone.

Romans 15:1

> We who are strong should help carry the weaknesses of those who are not strong, and not just please ourselves.

Spiritual Principle

True freedom is shown in choosing to serve others.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The freest person is the one who chooses to become a servant for Christ's sake.

XX. TO THE JEWS AS A JEW

1 Corinthians 9:20 — Under the Law to Win Those Under the Law

"To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law (though not myself under the law), that I might win those under the law."

Paul gives examples.

"To the Jews I became as a Jew."

Paul was Jewish by birth.

But in Christ, he was no longer bound by Jewish customs as a way to be right with God.

Still, when he was with Jews, he followed their customs.

He did this so that nothing unnecessary would offend them and keep them from hearing the gospel.

For example, he had Timothy circumcised before taking him to Jewish areas.

And he took part in a purification ceremony at the temple.

But notice Paul's careful words:

"Though not myself under the law."

He did not do these things to earn salvation.

He did them out of love, to reach people.

And when someone said circumcision was required for salvation, Paul refused, as with Titus.

Cross References

Acts 16:3

> Paul wanted Timothy to travel with him, so he circumcised him because of the Jews in that area, since they all knew his father was Greek.

Acts 21:26

> The next day Paul took the men, purified himself along with them, and went into the temple to announce when their days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

Galatians 2:3

> Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was forced to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.

Spiritual Principle

We may adapt our customs to reach people, but we must never change the gospel.

Key Truth

Paul was flexible in method and firm in message.

XXI. TO THOSE OUTSIDE THE LAW

1 Corinthians 9:21 — Under the Law of Christ

“To those outside the law, I became as one outside the law (not being outside God's law, but under the law of Christ), that I might win those outside the law.”

Paul's next example is the Gentiles.

“To those outside the law.”

Gentiles did not live by the Law of Moses.

When Paul was with them, he did not insist on Jewish customs.

He ate their food and lived among them.

But again, he adds a careful explanation:

“Not being outside God's law, but under the law of Christ.”

Paul was not lawless.

He did not live however he wanted.

He lived under **“the law of Christ”**—the law of love.

Being flexible did not mean being immoral.

Cross References

Romans 2:14

> When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.

Galatians 6:2

> Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Romans 3:19

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Spiritual Principle

Christian freedom is never freedom from obedience to Christ.

Spiritual Warning

Reaching people must never mean copying their sin.

XXII. ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE

1 Corinthians 9:22 — That I Might Save Some

“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that by all possible means I might save some.”

Paul's final example connects directly to Chapter 8.

“To the weak I became weak.”

The weak were the believers with sensitive consciences.

Paul gave up his rights so as not to make them stumble.

He would not eat meat if it hurt them.

Then Paul sums up his whole approach:

“I have become all things to all people.”

This does not mean Paul changed his beliefs to please everyone.

It means he was willing to adjust his customs, his habits, and his comfort to reach people.

“So that by all possible means I might save some.”

Paul was realistic.

Not everyone would be saved.

But he would do everything possible to win **some.**

Cross References

Romans 15:1

> We who are strong should help carry the weaknesses of those who are not strong, and not just please ourselves.

Romans 14:1

> Welcome anyone whose faith is weak, but do not argue with them about their opinions.

2 Corinthians 11:29

> Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not burn with distress?

Spiritual Principle

Love is willing to meet people where they are to bring them to Christ.

Application

What could you change about your habits, schedule, or comfort to reach someone with the gospel?

XXIII. FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 9:23 — Sharing in Its Blessings

“I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

Paul explains his motive.

“I do all this for the sake of the gospel.”

Everything Paul gave up, he gave up for the gospel.

The gospel was the center of his life.

“That I may share in its blessings.”

Paul did not see his sacrifice as pure loss.

He saw it as a way to share in the blessings of the gospel.

The joy of seeing people saved.

The joy of fellowship with Christ.

The joy of the reward to come.

Cross References

Philippians 1:12

> Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually helped spread the good news.

2 Timothy 1:8

> So don't be ashamed to tell others about our Lord, and don't be ashamed of me, His prisoner. Instead, join me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God.

Romans 1:16

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power to save everyone who believes—first the Jew, and also the Gentile.

Spiritual Principle

Those who give themselves for the gospel share in its richest blessings.

Key Truth

No one ever loses by giving up something for the gospel.

XXIV. RUN TO WIN

1 Corinthians 9:24 — Only One Receives the Prize

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”

Paul now turns to a picture every Corinthian knew well.

Every two years, Corinth hosted the **Isthmian Games.**

Only the Olympics were more famous.

Crowds gathered to watch runners, boxers, and wrestlers.

“In a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize.”

In a race, many run, but only one wins.

Paul is not saying that only one Christian will be saved.

He is saying, **“Run with the same focus and effort as a runner who wants to win.”**

“Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”

Do not just jog along.

Run to win.

Cross References

Philippians 3:14

> I keep running toward the finish line to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1

> So since we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses, let us throw off everything that slows us down and the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race set before us.

Galatians 2:2

> I went because God showed me I should. I met privately with those who seemed to be leaders and explained to them the good news I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running, and had not run, my race for nothing.

Spiritual Principle

The Christian life is a race to be run with focus and commitment.

Application

Are you running to win, or just wandering along?

XXV. AN IMPERISHABLE CROWN

1 Corinthians 9:25 — Self-Control in All Things

“Everyone who competes exercises self-control in all things. They do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.”

Paul describes the athlete's training.

“Everyone who competes exercises self-control in all things.”

Athletes in the Isthmian Games trained for ten months.

They controlled what they ate.

They controlled when they slept.

They gave up many pleasures.

And what was the prize?

“A perishable crown.”

The winner received a wreath made of plants, such as pine.

Within days, it would dry up and fall apart.

Christians run for something far greater.

“An imperishable one.”

A crown that will never fade.

Eternal life and reward in the presence of God.

If athletes discipline themselves for a crown that dies, how much more should we for a crown that lasts forever?

Cross References

2 Timothy 2:5

> Likewise, an athlete does not receive the winner's crown unless he competes by the rules.

2 Timothy 4:8

> Now the crown of righteousness is waiting for me. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will give it to me on that day—and not only to me, but to all who have longed for His appearing.

James 1:12

> Blessed is the person who endures testing. After he has passed the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him.

Spiritual Principle

Eternal rewards are worth far more discipline than earthly rewards.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If the world will sacrifice for a crown that withers, believers can sacrifice for a crown that lasts forever.

XXVI. RUNNING WITH PURPOSE

1 Corinthians 9:26 — Not Beating the Air

“Therefore I run with purpose, not aimlessly. I fight not as one beating the air.”

Paul uses two more athletic pictures.

“I run with purpose, not aimlessly.”

A runner who does not know where the finish line is will never win.

Paul knew his goal.

He ran straight toward it.

“I fight not as one beating the air.”

Now Paul pictures a boxer.

A boxer who swings wildly and hits nothing wastes his energy.

Paul's blows landed.

His life was focused.

He did not waste his effort on things that did not matter.

Cross References

2 Timothy 4:7

> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Ephesians 6:12

> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Hebrews 12:1

> So since we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses, let us throw off everything that slows us down and the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race set before us.

Spiritual Principle

A focused life accomplishes more for God than a busy, scattered one.

Application

What is your goal?

Are your days moving you toward it, or are you beating the air?

XXVII. I DISCIPLINE MY BODY

1 Corinthians 9:27 — Not Disqualified

“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

Paul ends with a personal confession.

“I discipline my body.”

The word Paul uses is a boxing term.

It means to strike hard, to give a black eye.

Paul treated his own desires like an opponent in the ring.

“And bring it into subjection.”

He made his body serve him, instead of letting his body rule him.

Why?

“So that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

Paul knew the danger of preaching to others and failing himself.

Bible students understand **disqualified** in different ways.

Some believe Paul feared losing his reward or his usefulness in ministry.

Others believe he is warning that a life without self-control can show that a person's faith was never real.

Either way, the warning is serious.

Even the great apostle did not take his own faithfulness for granted.

Cross References

Romans 8:13

> For if you live by your sinful nature, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the evil deeds of the body, you will live.

Colossians 3:5

> So put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual sin, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idol worship.

Galatians 5:24

> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Spiritual Principle

Self-discipline is a vital part of following Christ.

Spiritual Warning

No one is too gifted or too experienced to fall.

Watch your own life as carefully as you teach others.

XXVIII. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 1 CORINTHIANS 9

1. True Leadership Sacrifices Rights

Paul had every right to be supported, but he did not use it.

Principle:

Though Paul had every right as an apostle to receive support, he laid it down for the sake of the gospel.

2. The Gospel Demands Flexibility

Paul became all things to all people.

Principle:

We may adjust our approach so more might come to Christ, but we must never compromise the truth.

3. Preaching Is a Necessity, Not a Choice

“Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”

Principle:

For Paul, the gospel was not a career but a divine calling.

4. Discipline Is Vital for Discipleship

Athletes discipline their bodies for a prize.

Principle:

Christians must bring their desires under control for an eternal reward.

5. Eternal Perspective Guides Service

Earthly crowns fade, but ours is imperishable.

Principle:

The prize of eternal life in Christ makes every sacrifice worthwhile.

XXIX. SIX REASONS PAUL HAD THE RIGHT TO SUPPORT

In verses 1–14, Paul builds a strong case.

1. His Apostleship (verses 1–3)

He was a true apostle who had seen the risen Lord.

2. The Other Apostles (verses 4–6)

Peter, the Lord's brothers, and the other apostles received support.

3. Everyday Life (verse 7)

Soldiers, farmers, and shepherds all benefit from their work.

4. The Law of Moses (verses 8–10)

“You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.”

5. The Temple Priests (verse 13)

Those who served at the altar ate from the offerings.

6. The Command of Jesus (verse 14)

“Those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”

Key Truth

Paul proved his right beyond question, and then gladly gave it up.

XXX. FLEXIBLE IN METHOD, FIRM IN MESSAGE

Verses 19–23 show both Paul's flexibility and his firmness.

What Paul Was Willing to Change

- His customs.
- His diet.
- His comfort.
- His rights.
- His way of relating to different cultures.

What Paul Would Never Change

- The gospel of Christ crucified and risen.
- Salvation by grace through faith.
- Obedience to the law of Christ.
- His refusal to sin.

An Important Example

Paul circumcised Timothy to reach Jews.

But he refused to circumcise Titus when others said it was required for salvation.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Change your methods to reach people, but never change the message that saves them.

XXXI. THE ISTHMIAN GAMES

Paul's athletic pictures would have spoken powerfully to the Corinthians.

A Famous Contest

The Isthmian Games were held near Corinth every two years.

Only the Olympic Games were more famous.

Strict Training

Athletes trained for months under strict rules.

They controlled their diet, sleep, and habits.

A Perishable Prize

The winner received a wreath made from plants, which quickly withered.

The Christian's Contest

Christians run a race for an imperishable crown.

They fight against sin and the desires of the flesh.

They aim for the prize God has promised.

Key Truth

The Christian life calls for at least as much discipline as an athlete gives to a fading prize.

XXXII. WHAT 1 CORINTHIANS 9 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

The Risen Lord

Paul saw **“Jesus Christ our Lord”** after His resurrection.

The Lord Who Sends

Paul's apostleship came **“in the Lord.”**

The Lord Who Commands Support for His Workers

“The Lord has commanded.”

The Lord Whose Law We Live Under

Believers are **“under the law of Christ.”**

The Servant King

Paul's servanthood reflects Jesus, who came to serve and give His life.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Paul gave up his rights because Jesus gave up His glory.

XXXIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why does Chapter 9 come right after Chapter 8?

In Chapter 8, Paul said he would give up meat rather than cause a brother to stumble.

In Chapter 9, he shows that he had already given up many rights for the sake of others.

Question 2

How did Paul prove he was an apostle?

He had seen the risen Lord.

And the Corinthian church itself was the fruit of his ministry.

Question 3

What rights did Paul have as an apostle?

The right to be supported with food and drink.

The right to bring a believing wife and have her supported.

The right not to work at another job.

Question 4

What does the law about not muzzling an ox teach?

If God cared that a working ox could eat, He certainly cares that His servants are supported.

The Old Testament was written to teach us.

Question 5

Why did Paul refuse to take money from the Corinthians?

So that nothing would hinder the gospel.

He did not want to be confused with teachers who spoke for money.

Question 6

Does this mean churches should not pay their pastors?

No.

Paul clearly taught that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

He chose to give up his right in Corinth for a special reason.

Question 7

Why couldn't Paul boast about preaching?

Preaching was not his choice.

God had called him, and he could not keep silent.

Question 8

What was Paul's reward?

The joy of offering the gospel free of charge.

Question 9

What does it mean to become “all things to all people”?

It means adjusting customs and habits to reach different people.

It does not mean changing the gospel or joining in sin.

Question 10

What is the “law of Christ”?

It is the law of love that Christ taught and lived.

Believers are free from the Law of Moses as a way of salvation, but they are not free to live without obeying Christ.

Question 11

What does Paul mean by disciplining his body?

He refused to let his desires rule him.

He fought against sin and kept himself under control.

Question 12

What should 1 Corinthians 9 change about the way Christians live today?

1 Corinthians 9 should cause believers to live:

- Willing to give up their rights for the gospel.
- Supporting those who preach God's word.
- Serving others, not demanding their own way.
- Flexible in method but firm in the message.
- Unable to keep silent about Christ.
- Running the Christian race with purpose.
- Disciplining their desires.
- Living for the imperishable crown.

XXXIV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

1 Corinthians 9 asks several important questions.

What Rights Am I Holding Too Tightly?

Is there something I need to give up for the sake of others?

Do I Support Those Who Teach Me?

Am I generous with those who serve me in God's word?

Am I a Servant to Others?

Or do I expect others to serve me?

Am I Willing to Leave My Comfort Zone?

Could I adjust my habits to reach someone for Christ?

Do I Feel the Urgency of the Gospel?

Is there a fire in my heart to share Christ?

Am I Running to Win?

Or am I drifting through my Christian life?

Am I Disciplined?

Do my desires control me, or do I control them?

Am I Watching My Own Life?

Am I living what I tell others to live?

XXXV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Rights Given Up, Souls Won”

Most people fight for their rights.

They insist on what they deserve.

They demand to be treated fairly.

Paul had more rights than most.

He was an apostle.

He had seen the risen Lord.

He founded the church.

He had every reason to expect support.

But he gave it all up.

He worked with his hands.

He went hungry.

He became a servant to all.

Why?

Because he wanted to win people to Christ.

He followed the example of Jesus.

Jesus had every right as the Son of God.

Yet He laid them all down and became a servant, even to death on a cross.

This creates a powerful principle.

The rights we give up for the gospel are never lost.

They are invested in eternity.

Principle:

Fight for souls, not for rights.

XXXVI. FINAL APPLICATION

1 Corinthians Chapter 9 was written to a church that loved its rights.

They insisted on their freedom to eat what they wanted.

They judged Paul for not taking their money.

They admired leaders who demanded support.

Paul showed them a better way.

The way of the servant.

The way of the athlete.

The way of the cross.

He gave up his rights.

He became all things to all people.

He disciplined himself to win an imperishable crown.

1 Corinthians 9 therefore reminds us:

Never let your rights hinder the gospel.

Never think you are too important to serve.

Never change the message to please people.

Never take your own faithfulness for granted.

Never forget the crown that will last forever.

The church does not need people who demand their rights.

It needs:

Servants who give up their rights.

Witnesses who cannot stay silent.

Runners who run to win.

And disciples who discipline themselves for Christ.

The same gospel still calls us:

Tell people that Christ gave up everything to save them.

Tell people the gospel is offered freely.

Tell people that there is a prize that will never fade.

And as you run your race:

Serve all.

Win some.

Discipline yourself.

Run to win.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the gospel of Jesus Christ, offered freely to all who believe.

Thank You for faithful servants like Paul who gave up everything to share it.

Thank You for those who have taught us Your word and served us in Christ.

Thank You that Jesus, who had every right as Your Son, made Himself a servant for us.

Forgive us when we have held on to our rights more tightly than to Your purposes.

Forgive us when we have expected others to serve us.

Forgive us when we have kept silent about the gospel.

Forgive us when we have drifted instead of running the race.

Give us hearts that would rather serve than be served.

Help us support those who preach and teach Your word.

Make us willing to leave our comfort to reach others for Christ.

Keep us firm in the gospel while we adjust our ways to reach people.

Put a fire in our hearts that will not let us stay silent.

Help us run with purpose and fight not as those beating the air.

Give us self-control and discipline in every part of life.

Keep us faithful to the end, so that after we have shared the gospel with others, we ourselves will stand approved.

And may we receive the crown that will never fade.

“I have become all things to all people, so that by all possible means I might save some.”

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“I have become all things to all people, so that by all possible means I might save some.” — 1 Corinthians 9:22

Central Truth

For the sake of the gospel, Paul gladly gave up his rights, made himself a servant to all, and disciplined himself like an athlete, because winning people to Christ and receiving the eternal prize was worth any sacrifice.

1 Corinthians 9 in One Sentence

Paul proves his right as an apostle to be supported, explains that he gave up that right so nothing would hinder the gospel, describes how he became a servant to all to win as many as possible, and calls believers to run the Christian race with discipline for a crown that will never fade.