

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

You understand us, Lord Jesus, within every circumstance of life, and we thank You for this grace. Sometimes, our hearts are so full that we pour out our deepest feelings in prayer almost without thought; at other times, we are so empty, our hearts can give You nothing other than the sincerity of silent worship. But You understand, Lord Jesus; You meet us on our journey, wherever we are. We praise You Lord Jesus. AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

#### **Prayer ideas**\_(Alternatives that can broaden the experience of prayer)

Look up a favourite Psalm, and select from it a suitable verse of praise God. As you pray for yourself and for others, use this prayer of praise as refrain, reminding you of the magnificence and glory of God in whom you trust

#### **On-going prayers**

- **Pray for Christian youth camps.** *At this time of the year, many Christians operate youth camps, designed to give young people something to do over the summer break and also presents them with the challenges of Christ, and Christian living. If you know of any such venture near you, pray for this*
- *Pray for the politicians who are responsible for justice and law in your country. Pray that they will stand against all corruption and seek the good of all citizens*
- *Give thanks today for your body, and offer to God in prayer all your illnesses, small as well as great*

### Meditation

Speak to us with words of prophecy, Lord God,  
So we may discern the truth of Your will.

Speak to us with words of trial and challenge;  
So we may be tested to our limits.

Speak to us with words of blessing and support;  
So we may be empowered for action.

Speak to us with words of wisdom and revelation;  
So we may be fed by them, day and night.

Speak to us with words of faith and sound teaching;  
So we may accept the Word of God.

Speak to us with words of love and comfort;  
So we may a blessing to others in a troubled world.

Speak to us with words of power and meaning;  
So we may grasp them now, and never let them go

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

<sup>1</sup> Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work done in the Lord? <sup>2</sup> If I am not an apostle to others, then surely I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

<sup>3</sup> This is my defence to those who would sit in judgment over me; <sup>4</sup> Do we not have the right to our food and drink? <sup>5</sup> Do we not have the right to travel with a wife who is a believer, as do the other apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? <sup>6</sup> Or is it only Barnabas and I who do not have the right to stop working for a living? <sup>7</sup> Whoever pays his own wages to serve in battle? Whoever fails to eat the fruit of a vineyard he has planted, or drink the milk of the flock he has shepherded?

<sup>8</sup> Do I say these things as a mere man? Does the law not say the same? <sup>9</sup> It is written in the Law of Moses, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading grain'. Now is God concerned for the ox? <sup>10</sup> Does he not really speak for our sake? It was written for our sakes, so that the one who ploughs should plough in hope, and the one who threshes, in hope of receiving a share. <sup>11</sup> If we have sown spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap the material benefits from you? <sup>12</sup> If others share this just claim on you, how much more should we?

However, we did not make use of this claim, and instead endured everything lest we place any obstacle in the way of the Gospel of Christ. <sup>13</sup> Do you not know that those who work in temple service get what they eat from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? <sup>14</sup> In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel.

## Review

This is a rather strange passage in 1 Corinthians, because here, Paul launches vigorously into a personal defence of his status as an apostle. The change from the previous chapter seems sharp, but throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul has taken up one issue after another, as if dealing with a random list; sexual immorality (ch.5), lawsuits (ch.6), relationships and marriage (ch.7), and food offered to idols (ch.8). In all of this, Paul presents himself as fighting a rearguard action against those in the Corinthian church who took issue with him on these matters. Now, however, some had called his apostleship into question (3:1f.).

In most of his letters, Paul had to deal with those who said he was not an apostle because he was not one of Jesus' disciples. His arguments vary, but here, he says that the true evidence of his apostleship lies in the foundation and existence of the church at Corinth (9:1,2) itself. The record of Paul's work in Corinth is in Acts 18, in particular the fact that he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, working as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3f.) whilst establishing the church. This was to become a contentious issue.

The argument arose over Paul's choice to settle and work in Corinth, and whether this meant that he was doing the proper work of an 'apostle', or not. The word 'apostle' means 'one who was sent', and Paul's opponents said that someone who settled and worked at a trade was clearly not living in Corinth for the sole purpose of evangelism! They claimed that a true apostle had supporters who paid for their work and supported them, and this was not the case when Paul came!

Most of our passage is Paul's reply to this. In verses 3 to 12, he makes the general case that an apostle should expect to be given all necessary support. He also makes a number of interesting observations, firstly, that an apostle is entitled to bring a wife (9:5)! Some think that Paul was indeed claiming this right for himself, thus proving that he was married, even though his wife is not mentioned anywhere else in his letters! We would love to know whether Paul had a wife, but there is no clear way of knowing.

Paul compares his work with that of other apostles and evangelists, naming Cephas (Peter) and '*the brothers of the Lord*' (9:5). Nowhere else do we read of the brothers of Jesus as being apostles, so this is indeed a fascinating insight, moreover, they were known to receive material support from the churches they founded. So should not Paul and his companion Barnabas receive the same (9:6)? Paul adds the example of a soldier in battle, who is paid for his services (9:7), and then offers some scriptural backing by quoting one of the laws of Moses, '*Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading grain*' (9:9, Deuteronomy 25:4).

The Corinthians would have accepted most of this, but Paul goes further to make his complaint at the lack of support he received from this church he had founded (9:12f.). He says that when he first came to Corinth, he did not take advantage of these 'rights' of an apostle. He had not asked for any support (see Acts 18:3) because he judged that they would compromise the Gospel at that time (9:12). But the way Paul writes this makes for a mild rebuke, for he has only just advised that stronger Christians should take account of the weaker faith of those who felt they could not eat meat (8:12f.); so here, he makes the Corinthians out to be weaker Christians, whom he is protecting by his magnanimity!

Today, many strong opinions are held about how best to support church workers and provide suitable funding. It is therefore vital that we understand this passage properly. Scripture says here that although 'tent-making' may have been a wise principle in the case of pioneering evangelism, in the normal run of things, a church should make all proper provision for its workers. Indeed, the way in which Paul talks about

the matter leaves us feeling that we ignore the right of a church worker to be properly paid at our peril. On the other hand, the church should allow for the fact that in front line evangelism, and possibly elsewhere, it is wise for workers to be supported from somewhere other than their place of work, so as not to compromise the church's mission. Certainly, the rest of this chapter strongly advocates the responsibility of the church to provide properly and fully for those who do the full time work of Christ in the world.

## Going Deeper

- Notes on the translation of the passage
- The seal of apostleship (9:2)
- The rights of an apostle (9:3-7)
- Muzzling the ox or the apostle! (9:8-10)
- Deferring to the weaker believer. (9:12-14)

### **Notes on the translation of the passage**

#### **V1 'Are you not my work done in the Lord'**

Most Bible versions have 'are you not my work in the Lord?' However, there is a stress in the Greek on the verb 'to be' (which is often absent in a sentence but in this case is present) and this gives a literal reading of 'Are you not my work which is in the Lord.' When put like this, the English equivalent is to state that this work is done 'in the Lord', for that is what Paul wished to emphasise.

#### **V8 'Do I say these things as a mere man?'**

The Greek here is not easy to translate, and you will find Bible versions differ. It indicates a question with a negative answer, 'do I say these things as a man?' I feel that the sense of the question is made clear by the addition of the word 'mere', because this helps us understand that Paul was using the word 'man' in the sense of a 'mortal being'.

#### **V9 'Now, is God concerned for the ox?'**

This is a question which is written with a Greek word which indicates the answer is 'No.'

#### **V10 'the one who threshes ...'**

If you read this part of verse 10 in different translations, you will find that they vary widely. This is due to attempts to find some equality between the one who ploughs and the one who threshes; however, I have translated this almost exactly as it is in Greek.

### **The seal of apostleship (9:2)**

When Paul begins this section, he defends his apostleship in two ways, and adds a third comment about the Corinthian church as being the 'seal' of his apostleship. His first point of defence is that he has 'seen the Lord', the claim he makes in most of his letters (e.g. Eph 3:3). The second point of defence is that his founding of the church at Corinth was irrefutable. Paul always emphasised that a work of God was known 'by its fruits' (Rom 8:23, Gal 5:22, Col 1:6), and he justly claimed that the evidence of his apostleship was the reality of the growing church in the Roman Empire. It was no small boast, but one Paul was glad to make if it enabled God to be praised, and the Gospel to be made more effective.

The second verse of this chapter is like an addendum to this latter point. Paul says that whatever he was or was not to other churches, surely the Corinthians knew that he had founded the church there and so he addressed them as the 'seal of my apostleship'. By using this term, Paul made no personal claim on the church; the term did not oblige the church, as if they owed him something and he was trying to get it out of them, for example. The last thing he wanted was for the people there to feel that by raising the issues of payment, as he was just about to do, he was covertly asking for money. The idea of a 'seal' implies completion and approval; and for Paul, his pioneering work there was complete, and even if he went there again it could never be to continue or complete something previously begun.

### **The rights of an apostle (9:3-7)**

Paul quotes within this part of the text what appears to be common ground in understanding the 'rights' of an apostle. It is not always clear in English, but the way that the questions are asked in Greek always indicates the expected answer, and there is no doubt that Paul expected general acceptance. An apostle should be provided with food and drink, and could travel with a wife who was a believer. Incidentally, the Greek says 'a sister as a wife', and some suggest that this implies a travelling companion rather than a real wife, but I see no good grounds for such an assumption. There is more to come, but in the middle of this non-controversial subject matter, Paul inserts some cutting remarks.

Firstly, Paul claims that these rights should be shared as with 'the brothers of the Lord and Cephas (Peter)' (9:5). This is just another way of making his case that his own work was on the same level as that of these other 'apostles'. It is interesting however, that Paul mentions not only Cephas (Peter), but also the 'brothers of the Lord'. There is no other information either within scripture or outside of it that suggests more than one brother of Jesus, the brother named James (Gal 1:19). It is intriguing therefore to think that several brothers of our Lord were actively involved with the spread of the early church. In those days, the church required proof of connection with Jesus for matters of faith to be 'authenticated', and what closer connection could there be than a brotherhood! Alternatively, it is just possible that the term 'brothers of the Lord' became attached to the apostles, or a group of them, in which case, Paul's point here is made perhaps better. Though if this is the case, why mention 'the other apostles' and Cephas separately?

Secondly, Paul interjects in verse 6; 'or is it only Barnabas and I who do not have the right to stop working for a living?' This is a rather pained expression, and in some versions of the Bible, the double negative makes it rather hard to understand (see notes above). By saying this, Paul issues a thinly veiled accusation that the Corinthians are guilty of using double standards in the matter of being hospitable to apostles. He also accuses them of not understanding the free choice of Paul to lay aside such apostolic privileges as a 'free man' (9:1). In addition, the mention of Barnabas is curious. Paul broke up with Barnabas previously, and acrimoniously (Acts 15:36-41). Was Paul attempting to include him here to reach out to him by referring to him along with other apostles?

The section continues with Paul describing the work of an apostle as like going into battle, planting a vineyard, and shepherding (9:7). Each of these images is fascinating in its own right, and is not merely casual, for the three pictures bring together the leadership qualities of the king (in battle), the priest (who tends the vineyard) and the pastor (who shepherds the sheep). In this way, an apostle uniquely continues in one ministry the work of our Lord. However, the point made is that the one who does battle is provided for, and the keeper of the vineyard and the shepherd benefit directly from the produce they tend. This is just a different way for Paul to express the work he has done, tie it to the standard understanding of an apostle, and claim the rights of an apostle.

#### ***Muzzling the ox or the apostle! (9:8-10)***

The concluding point is that an apostle is someone who should be provided for completely whilst doing the work of the Lord (9:8-10), as indicated in the Law (Deuteronomy 25:4), and Paul makes a strong point from this. Anyone reading the original text in Deuteronomy might not consider that the issue was anything more than about ox treading grain; however, it was common practice within Judaism to find in such single verse texts a general principle to be applied in other circumstances. It is fairly well established in Jewish commentaries that the text did indeed convey a principle that one doing the work should be appropriately free to benefit from it, in (part) payment for work done.

As Paul goes on to say, the apostle could therefore expect to benefit materially from the increase of the church and its ability to support workers; those ploughing and threshing should do so in hope (9:10). The next verse seems a little stretched from our point of view, because it says that one who sowed spiritually could expect a material reward, and we might say that the connection between spiritual and material is rather strained here. However, Paul was careful to give an illustration of two activities that due to Jesus' teaching, had come to have considerable spiritual significance with material consequences; sowing and threshing (or sorting out the grain from the chaff – see Matthew 13 for the significance of both!). In each case, the material consequence was growth in the Kingdom of God on earth. Paul was not concerned to make the connection between increased numbers and increased resources of finance or hospitality, but it hardly needs making.

#### ***Deferring to the weaker believer. (9:12-14)***

The whole argument comes together, as we have already seen, from verse 12 onwards, as Paul states his reason for tent-making when in Corinth, and not claiming the rights of an apostle. However, Paul is careful to use this not so much for his own benefit, by reinforcing the whole point further, but to insist on the duty of a church to make provision for apostles. After all, they had been weak in this matter when Paul had first been there, hence his decision to 'make tents', and it was time for the Corinthians to face their complete responsibilities to all those who worked for the Lord whether from Corinth or not. It was a general principle that those who worked in the Lord's service should receive what they needed from 'the temple'. The one principle we should leave this whole passage of scripture with is not that of tent-making as a means of providing for ministry, but the responsibility of God's people generally, as stated in verse 14; 'the Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel'. There may be a number of ways this can be achieved in practice, but a preacher or church worker, according to this rule, should not be left to fend for himself or herself.

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# Discipleship

## Application

There are many entrenched positions within churches about how its employed servants are paid or materially provided for. I know of some churches and organisations that regard it as a scriptural principle that its ministers and deacons should provide for themselves with a suitable 'tent-making' occupation, for example, so that the church's money can be better spent, perhaps by giving it away on other forms of mission. I strongly suggest that this is based on a misunderstanding of scripture. So called 'tent-making' according to Paul's own testimony is a second best option to be used when the people being served are 'weak' and unable to provide properly for those who serve them.

Another position is that of churches which tie the employment of ministers, clergy or deacons (for example) to the financial abilities of local churches, and in so doing limit people's perceptions of what can be done with material resources. The fact is that many people who go to church have little understanding of what happens with the money placed in the offertory and why it is given that it is not uncommon for people to give far more to various charities within their 'tithe' than they do to their own local church. Even though there are many worthy charities, churches in many countries (certainly England) suffer greatly because people only place in the offertory that which they observe will be sufficient to pay the minister and keep the church open. People object when asked to pay more, but the truth is that churches can be starved of the resources necessary to be creative and 'apostolic' in their work, doing those new things that need to be done if the church is to witness to its own generation and the next.

I, along with many others and most probably you who read this, long for the day when the church is properly resourced and trusted to support the apostolic mission of the church fully. Under such circumstances, and when support is more than financial, but also hospitable and charitable in the broadest sense, even the smallest church community is capable of doing great things for God. I may have stretched Paul's point somewhat to say this, but the principles he lays down lead us here, not towards an impoverished church struggling to maintain existing buildings and ministry!

Also, It is very important for Christians today to look carefully at the use of resources. I am convinced that many churches are limited by perceptions of what can and can't be done, and where 'the money' goes. A good start will always be to be open and frank about what happens to money in the church, and to work at the sense of fellowship that helps people feel their material contribution to the life of the church is valued and part of something exciting. Money drives far more today than it did in Paul's day, and so we should not be surprised if a great deal of what we feel we should do in the church relates fundamentally to money available. However, this passage also reminds us that hospitality is also an essential material form of support, and it can be expressed in a large number of ways

## Questions for groups

1. The word apostle is used very particularly within the Bible, can we use it today concerning offices in the church and retain its full value?
2. Do the 'rights of an apostle' apply now to anyone in the life of the church, and if so, who?
3. Discuss the possible circumstances when it would be good to practice 'tent-making', instead of relying on the church for support.

## Discipleship challenges

- *Ask yourself whether your own support of ministry in the church is significant. What portion of the money you give away or tithe, for example, goes into supporting the apostolic work of the church? It is worth doing some calculations ... but you may also have to find out one or two facts about how your local church handles its money!*
- *Pray for God's people everywhere to be motivated to support every kind of ministry insofar as they are able.*

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## Final Prayer

Lord God, You sent Your Son to live the life of a man and to take part in what happens within this world; and He lived an incredible life of integrity and love. Help us to follow His example and seek every opportunity to do what is right and good in the world, not just for ourselves and those we love, but for all people. Thank You Lord God. AMEN

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