Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Supporting the Man of God
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:1-14
Code: 1835

I really praise the Lord for the opportunity this morning to share again out of the Word with you; but I have to admit at the very beginning that this is one of the most difficult messages I've ever had to preach. It's difficult for a very unusual reason. Some messages I find very difficult, because the part of the Scripture we're dealing with is complex or because you have to preach on a subject that you're not really having victory on in your own life, and that's convicting. But the reason that this is difficult is because the message this morning deals with six reasons why the preacher should be paid...

So...and I would never choo...in fact, in seven years, I've never preached on this; but it happens to be in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, so I'm gonna go ahead, since we were in chapter 8 last week; and you can rest assured that we'll be in chapter 10 sometime in the future, as soon as we finish with this subject. But I wanna say at the very beginning, just put a little preface in if I can, that what I say this morning does not have reference to me. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ has been extended abundantly to me through the gifts of the people at Grace Church. I receive far more than I am worthy of and far more than I would ever ask for and far more than I earn or far more than I deserve, so this is not an application to me; and I know some of our first-time guests are gonna say, "You got to church once a year, Martha, and the preacher's speaking about giving him money. That's what I told you. They're hypocrites." You know, and all of that.

So, Martha, try to straighten him out, will ya? This is... this is not the norm. This is what's here in the Scripture. I have a commitment in my heart, and that is that we are to teach the whole counsel of God, and that the Spirit of God has a reason and a purpose for having us talking about certain things at certain times, and I just leave it in His hands.

We're gonna look at verse 1 to 18 this morning and next Lord's Day morning, and it's really incomplete today. I...I say that often to you, but it...to get the whole picture, you have to come back next time, because we have to put all of that together so that it makes sense. But we're gonna be talking about the freedom of not using your freedom; and in reference to that, Paul gives the illustration that we're going to discuss in chapter 9.

Now, you'll remember, we're studying 1 Corinthians, and you remember that, in this letter, Paul is answering questions that the Corinthians asked, at least in the middle section. One of the questions they asked regarded eating meat that had been offered to an idol. In that pagan society, people would sacrifice meats to idols. Now, the meat that wasn't burnt on the altar would wind up in a

marketplace somewhere. The priest would take it and sell it, or the people would take it back and sell it, or they would take it back and serve it on their table. So Christians were in situations where they would be eating meat that had been offered to an idol; and some of the Christians were wondering whether this was right or not.

Well, the Corinthian people, the mature ones, the strong Christians were saying, "What's the difference? There are no such thing as other God's anyway. An idol isn't anything, and God isn't really too concerned about food. It isn't what goes in you that defiles you. It's what comes out of you. So it isn't any big deal. Eat up; but some of the brand new baby Christians who had just been saved out of idol worship, and just come to Christ out of paganism, found it very difficult to do that, because that whole thing represented a way of life that was distasteful to them, that they had rejected and turned their back on; and to see some Christians just eating up and having a great old time eating this meat became very offensive to them, because they were so antagonistic toward that way of life from which they had been delivered; and so there were some Christians who had the right to eat. I mean the Bible didn't forbid it. They were right. It was all right; but there were other Christians who were being injured by it. So Paul introduces a principle in chapter 8, which we studied last time, and the principle is this. You may have the freedom to do something, but don't do it if it's gonna hurt somebody else. Don't do it if it's gonna wound somebody else. Don't do it if it's gonna grieve somebody else.

In Romans 14, he uses the illustration of drinking. He says, in effect, there, you know, there's nothing wrong with wine; but if it's gonna make somebody stumble, think less of your Christian faith, if it's gonna cause them to drink, and they can't handle it, and they become drunken, then you have been an occasion to their stumbling. You're better not to do it. So the Christian has a freedom. There are some things that are definitely wrong. The Bible tells us what they are; but in the gray area, you know, the area that the Bible doesn't forbid, we have freedom. We have complete liberty, but love becomes the limiter of our liberty. We don't wanna do something that makes somebody offend or that causes somebody to fall into a sin that they can't handle. Maybe there are some things you can handle that they can't handle. Maybe you could go to a feast and eat meat offered to an idol, and...and you'd just be eating there; but maybe another Christian would go to this little feast, and they'd have meat offered to an idol, and he would get caught in the whole orgy that went with the feast, because he was so weak.

So, yes, we have liberty in Christ, but our liberty is limited by love. I will not do some things that I have the right to do simply because somebody'd be offended, and...and I've been the cause of somebody stumbling. That's verse 13 of chapter 8, and that's how he closes out the principle. Look at it with me, and we'll just start there. "Wherefore, if food makes my brother offend, I won't even eat...he says...I don't wanna do anything to make him offend. As long as the world stands, I don't wanna make my brother offend. Now this is a super Christian principle that we, as Christians, have a responsibility to other folks to live lives that are not offensive to them. To live lives that don't

purposely go about doing whatever we want, because we have the liberty to do it in Christ, no matter how it affects someone.

Now, having stated that tremendously important principle, Paul wants to illustrate it. I told you that he states the principle in chapter 8. He illustrates it in chapter 9 through chapter 10 verse 13, and he applies it from 10:14 to chapter 11 verse 1. So he states the principle, and now he is going to illustrate it. He's great at illustrations, and he wants us to understand what this principle is like, and he gives two illustrations. One is from the life of Israel, and one is from his own life.

The one from his own life makes up chapter 9, so all of chapter 9 is an illustration from the life of Paul of how he had a liberty that he could've used, but he didn't use it, because somebody would've been offended. What is that liberty? What is that right? It is the right to support from the church. He had the right to expect the Corinthian church to pay him money for his ministry, to support him, to underwrite him, to provide his needs. He had the perfect right for that, but he chose not to use that right; and he chose, rather, to make tents all through his ministry and earn his own living; because he felt, in his case, in the early birth of the church, that to demand that right would've become a terrible offense to many people; and he was afraid that some people wouldn't even become Christians because they would see Christianity as some kind of a movement fostered by this man who did it to get people to give him money. So he was so conscientious about how he would come across that, throughout his entire ministry, he never exercised the right he had to ask for support, and he worked with his hands, always earning his own way.

Now, he's gonna tell us about that liberty that he set aside. But, first, he gives in verses 1 to 14, six reasons why the minister is worthy of support; and then he shows in verses 15 to 18 why he didn't choose to use that liberty. Now, we'll see how that all applies to today as we go, and then next week in particular.

Let's look, first of all, at these six reasons why Paul could have asked for support and expected it; and we could kinda title this thing, "Six Reasons to Pay the Preacher." "Six Reasons to Support a Missionary." "Six Reasons to Take Care of the Ministers." That's just what he's talking about. Why is it that a minister of God, a servant of God, whatever ministry he has, is worthy of the support of the people?

Reason No. 1 in Paul's case is that he was an apostle. That's No. 1. He was an apostle. Let's look at verses 1 to 6 where he opens that up to us. Verse 1. Now, you'll notice two questions begin verse 1, and in the...in the original manuscripts, those questions would be reversed. He starts out by saying, "Am I not free? Am I not free?" Now, just think about that a minute. The...the Corinthians have been saying, "Hey, man, we're free to do anything we want. We can go eat meat offered to idols. We can go up to one of the pagan feasts. We don't have to do what they do. We can still eat their food. We're liberated people, man. We can just go out and do whatever we wanna do," and so

Paul says, "All right, I'm in your boat, too. Am I not free? Could I not do whatever I want? I'm not just a Christian like the rest of you. Am I not an...what?...an apostle. As a specially appointed apostle by Christ, do I not at least have the liberty that you do, and maybe just more? Am I certainly any less than you in my liberty? Don't I have the same freedom you do?"

And he's about to say, "Hey, I have the same liberty you do; and, yet, I set it aside; and I'm not demanding you to do anything that I haven't done myself. Am I not also free? Am I not even an apostle? And, yet, I set my liberty aside. I set my freedom aside, because I don't wanna offend somebody.

Now, some of them may have said, "Well, I'm not sure you're an apostle, fella." So he says in verse 1, "Am I not free? Am I not apostle?" And then he gives two reasons or two verifications of his apostleship. "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"...Now, the qualification for an apostle was that he be appointed by the resurrected Christ. An apostle had to be appointed by Jesus Christ personally, which means he would've had to have seen the resurrected Christ, Paul would've.

Had Paul ever seen the resurrected Christ? He says, "I've seen the Lord." In Acts 1:22, it says that whoever was to be appointed as an apostle to take up the place of Judas had to be a witness of the resurrected Christ. To be an apostle, you had to see Jesus Christ. Paul had that experience. In Acts chapter 22 in verse 17, he says this, "Came to pass when I was come again to Jerusalem and while I prayed in a temple, I was in a...a trance; and I saw Him saying unto me, 'Make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem. They will not receive your testimony'...and so forth...and I said, 'Lord.'"

So it was in Jerusalem in Acts 22 that Paul was having a little conversation with the Lord. The Lord appeared to him. In Acts chapter 9, earlier in the Book of Acts, Paul was walking along on the Damascus road, just on his way to persecute a few Christians. The Lord stopped him in his tracks. He fell down. He saw the blazing glory of the Lord and was blinded, and he said, "Lord...what wilt Thou have me to do?" Saw the Lord on the Damascus road. He saw the Lord later in Jerusalem.

There was a third place that he saw the Lord; and, interestingly enough, it was in the city of Corinth. In the 18th chapter of Acts and the 9th verse, when Paul was in Corinth, it says, "Then spoke the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision. 'Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace, for I am with thee.'" There, a third time, he saw the Lord. He had a vision of the Lord; so he had seen the resurrected Lord three times at least; and he says, "This is proof that He called me into the apostleship. I have seen Him. I am a witness of the living Christ. I am a witness that He has arisen from the dead."...

Now, the second thing that he uses to verify his apostleship is in chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, in the last statement of verse 1. "Are not you my work in the Lord?" Not only was the seeing of Christ a verification of his apostleship, but so was the Corinthian church. "If you have any doubts about my

apostleship," he says, "look at yourselves. Where do you think you came from? Aren't you the fruit of my labor? Aren't you the...the verification of my ministry?"

Look at verse 2, he further describes this truth. "If I am not an apostle unto others - I mean if you wanna deny me that in other cases, if you wanna say that I'm not really an apostle in other cases, doubtless I am to you. I certainly was a sent one." The word apostle means a sent one. "I certain was a sent one from God, and I brought the message to you, and you are the seal of my apostleship. You in the Lord. The fact that you're saved, the fact that you're in Christ, the fact that you've been born again, the fact that you're in the family of God, that you're a church oughta be proof enough that I'm an apostle, because I brought you the message. You oughta look at your own selves. You're my seal."

You know, in those days, whenever they wanted to accredit anything, they put a seal on it. If you were bagging beans, even, and you were shipping beans out on a boat somewhere, you'd close up your bean bag, and you'd stick a little deal of wax on it. You'd put your seal on it, and that would prove those were genuine beans, you know, or whatever. If you were boxing up a commodity and crating it up, you'd put a deal on that so...so that people would know that was the genuine thing. If you were writing a letter, and you wanted somebody to know that it was an authentic letter, you'd seal it with wax and put your seal in it. A seal was a mark of genuineness. So Paul says, "The mark of the genuineness of my apostleship are you in the Lord. You're a living seal to prove to everyone that I'm a genuine apostle."

Now, "As an apostle," he's saying, "do not I have liberty? Do not I have as much freedom as you and maybe even more?" And, of course, the implication is, "Well, yes." And then in verse 3, you take the two last words, "Is this," and put 'em on the front of the verse, and it'll make more sense. "This is my answer to them that do examine me." The word examine is a legal term. Talks about making an investigation before you make a decision. "So when anybody wants to try to decide whether I'm an apostle, here's the evidence I give them. One, I saw the Lord. Two, look at the results. I'm an apostle," he says.

"Now, as an apostle, I have liberty. I have freedom. I have freedom to do whatever I want; and one of the things that I have the freedom to do," he says, "is ask you for money. Is to ask you to support me." Verse 4. Now watch him. "Have we no right to eat and to drink?" And he's a little bit sarcastic with 'em at this point, just a little bit ironic. He's saying, "Now that you know that I'm an apostle, that's been established, are you saying that I have no right to food and drink?"

Verse 5, "Have we no right to lead about a sister, a wife," and what it really means is, "Have we no right to take a Christian sister as a wife and lead her about." Now, that doesn't mean, you know, a deal through the nose, "Come, Dear." That kinda deal. When it says to lead her about, it means, "Have we no right to take a Christian sister and marry her as a wife and take with us on our journeys?

Why, the other apostles do it. The brothers of our Lord do it, and Cephas, or Peter, does it. Are you saying that I only and Barnabas have no right to stop working? Everybody else can receive support, and everybody else can marry a Christian sister and take her on the journey, and the...and the believers will not only support him, but her, as well? But we can't?"

No, what he's saying is, "I have a right to support from you, and if I wanted to...he wasn't married at this time. His wife had most likely died...if I wanted to, I could take a Christian sister as a wife and expect that you would support her, as well. That's my liberty. That's my right to ask of you." Now this is interesting. He is saying that the church has the responsibility to support its leaders, its pastors, its evangelists, its missionaries; and I believe that. One of the reasons when we receive an offering here at Grace Church that we always say, or most always, "If you're a guest and a visitor with us, please don't feel any coercion to give. We would feel very, very badly if you felt that you had to give. That's for us to take care of. That's for us to share. That's the joy that we who know the Lord and who are a part of this family and this fellowship, that's our joy. That's our privilege, and, in addition, a great privilege of ours is to have you as a guest, and don't take that privilege from us. Be our guest. We don't wanna make the Gospel chargeable to the world; but the church does have the responsibility and the man of God does have the right to ask the church for support."

Now, I add a footnote, please, I'm not asking for more money. Don't give me more money, please...That...that is not the point. I'm already far, you know, and beyond whatever could be expected, and I praise God and thank Him; and it puts on me the responsibility being a steward for what you generously give; but I'm merely stating the principle, that the man of God has the right to be supported by the church in which he ministers.

Now, the sad thing, that just the...the heartbreaking thing, is that so many abuse this, and there...there are charlatans, and there are religious phonies, and there are people in the ministry for money. Believe me, there are; and there will always be abuse of this thing; and I think that the abuse of it is what tends to make us very restrictive in how we really operate; and we have to find a balance.

So Paul is saying, "As a...as an apostle, I have liberty. I have the right to ask for food and drink." That would be daily necessities, sustenance. "I even have the right to ask you to support my wife." Isn't it interesting in verse 5 that he says to take a sister as a wife? And what he means by sister is a Christian sister. There was never any other conception in the mind of a Christian in the early church. If a Christ was gonna marry, he would marry only a what? A Christian sister. I mean there wasn't any other thought. There would never be a mixed marriage, a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. That was foreign to them. In...in chapter 7:39 says the same thing. "Marry only in the Lord."

So he says, "If I wanna take a Christian sister along with me, you should be able to support that sister, as well." And I think what you have there is a verse that affirms the right of a minister to have an unemployed wife. That's practical, isn't it? I mean that's not up there in the foggy theological area. That's just saying, "Pay the preacher so that his wife doesn't need to work." Doesn't need to have employment. That's a tremendous truth. So many churches, I don't think, see the vision of that, and instead of paying the man of God so that he may support his whole family, they expect the wife to work when the Bible says he has a right to ask support even for the Christian sister he's taken as his wife. Not only to support her, but to take her along with him; and you know something? The apostles apparently took their wives. The other apostles, the brothers of our Lord who would be James and...and Jude and other brothers of Jesus Christ, half-brothers, of course, children of Mary and Joseph, but not of virgin birth as Jesus was. And Peter...Peter took his wife along with him. I...you ever know Peter had a wife? Sure, he did. His mother-in-law got sick, so if you got a mother-in-law, you got a wife...I'd like to meet Mrs. Peter. She must have been some lady...must be...she must be the living example of patience.

But, anyway, Paul says, "You know, the other apostles are taking their wives with 'em," and that's super. You know, I think the church has the responsibility to recognize this, even with missionaries, with anybody. You know, I...I...I feel like so many times someone will ask me to speak someplace, and they'll say, "You know, we want you to fly, for example, to Cleveland, Ohio, and there's a tremendous opportunity for a Bible conference here, and we'd like you to come, and we'd like to bring your wife as our guest, as well." You know, I really appreciate that, because me and my wife are one flesh, you know? And when she's with me, I'm a lot better off. I really am. I'm happier, easier to get along with. I can concentrate better on what I'm doing in ministry, and she can be supportive of me, and we share our life together, and that's an important thing.

And I feel, as a church, when we ask someone to come and speak here, it would be the thing to do to say, "Would you like to bring your wife? We'd be more than happy to support the coming of your wife so she could share these days with you." It's a question of generosity. It's a question of having the right attitude, and when somebody has asked us for support for some ministry or some mission or something, it oughta be with that kind of generosity and concern that, not only his needs are met, but those of his wife, so that they may minister together. I think a reason that you have divorces among people even in the ministry so many times is because you got one of 'em running around all over the place, never paying any attention to the other. And I don't think it's a question always of counseling. It may be a question of dollars so that the wife could go along.

This is really important. Well, so he says, "I have a right to food to drink, and I have a right to take my wife with me if I had a wife, which I don't, and I don't want one, 'cause I have the gift of celibacy." That's the last chapter or 7th chapter. But there's a principle here anyway, okay?

Now, verse 6, he says, "You're certainly not saying that everybody can do it but Barnabas and me. We have to work. That what you're saying?" Well, they couldn't say that. I mean they had liberty. They could ask of...of the church and expect to get money. Barnabas was his buddy. They had been co-pastors in Antioch; and when the call of the Lord came to go as missionaries to the Gentile world, Barnabas went with Paul. Two of 'em, and he's saying, "You're sure not gonna say that we're the two that have to work while everybody else is supported by the church." No.

So reason No. 1, Paul, said, "That I have the liberty to ask for support is I'm an apostle." Now watch reason No. 2 in verse 7. Reason No. 2 is it's the usual custom. It's the usual custom. "Who goes to war at any time at his own expense?" Did you ever know a soldier who fought the war all day and then went to work at night to earn his living? No, if a guy's in the Army, they're gonna pay him. Not a lot, but they're gonna pay him enough. They're gonna sustain him and get him food, lodging, and whatever clothing he needs, and they're gonna give him a little bit of money. Nobody goes to war and pays himself. In other words, it is human custom that a man earns his living by his work. That's all he's saying.

Next one, "Who plants a vineyard and eats not its fruit?" I mean if a guy plants a vineyard, he doesn't work as a farmer all day long and then go to...to work at night to earn a living. He gets his living from his farming. Out of that labor comes his living.

Third thing he uses is, "If somebody feeds a flock, doesn't he drink the milk?" Sure. He just uses three illustrations: a soldier, a farmer, and a shepherd. All three were cared for out of their occupation, and his conclusion is, "So why not the servant of God? Why shouldn't the servant of God be equally cared for out of his occupation?"...It's just human custom, as well as apostolic right.

But let's go to a third principle. A third reason is in verse 8. In fact, verse 8 through 11, and this is really interesting. "Say I these things as a man?" In the Greek ques--the form of that question in the Greek implies a negative answer. "No, I'm not just talking in human terms. I gave you the illustration of human custom in verse 7, but I'm gonna go beyond that. I'm not just saying these things as a man, or saith not the law...and he means the law of God...the same thing? Is thus just human reasoning, or does God's law say the same thing?" And the second question has implied in it a yes answer. Greek, the way they form a Greek question in the Greek language will give you an idea as to whether it's to be answered yes or no. This second question has a yes answer. "Do I say these things as a man?" No, "or doesn't the law say the same thing?" Yes, God's law, "For it is written...verse 9...in the Law of Moses." Yes, there is something in the Law of Moses. This isn't just a human analogy or human reason. God has something to say. You say, "What did he say?" Well, he quotes the Law of Moses. God's Old Testament, Deuteronomy 25:4, he quotes, "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treads out the grain." Now, you say, "What does that have to do with anything? What is he talking about? Muzzling an ox."

The Egyptians, that's a quote from Deuteronomy 25:4, and it was an Old Testament principle. Now, the Egyptians had an interesting custom that the Israelites picked up. Whenever they wanted to separate the grain from the husk, they would throw all of the stuff on a great floor, a great flat area, and they would get oxen, and they would tie to the oxen a great big, round, flat stone, and the oxen would just walk all over that grain, dragging that stone, crushing the husks and releasing the grain out of it. That's the way the separated it, and the law said, "Don't muzzle the mouth of the ox that treads the grain." You wanna have one frustrated ox, you just muzzle him and make him tread that grain. You'll really frustrate him. That would be inhumane. That would be unjust. If the ox is gonna drag that rock around all day, he oughta be able to take a few bites now and then. That's the point, see.

In other words, the...the principle, the metaphor is a person ought to earn his living out of his labor. His sustenance should come from out of his labor. There shouldn't be a labor, and then some other source of sustenance. He oughta be supported in what he does. If the ox is climbing on the grain, he oughta be able to eat a little of it while he's doing it. If the farmer owns the vineyard, and he's out farming, he oughta take a grape or two. If the soldier's fighting in a war, he oughta be able to...to get paid for his efforts. If the guy has a flock, he oughta be able to drink a little of the milk himself...

And, you see, this is exactly what the principle of the Bible says, not just human custom, but the Bible says, "Don't muzzle the ox." Now, that's a quote from Deuteronomy 25:4, as I told you; and I don't think it even is talking about animals there. I think it's strictly an analogy. It's strictly a metaphor; and it says at the end of verse 9, "Does God take care for oxen?" I mean is the meaning of this passage to apply to an ox? Are all the oxen supposed to get around and look at Deuteronomy 25:4, and...and take this personally? Well, who is this for?

I don't think God had an ox in mind. Now, God is not anti-ox. I want you to...to know that. God...God does care that the oxen are...are, you know, get what oxen need. In fact, in Psalm 147 verse 9 and Job 38 verse 41, it said God...it says, "God feeds the beast of the field." God wants the oxen to have something to eat. God does care about animals. God is not anti-animal. He feeds the birds. Matthew 6 talks about it. God takes care of the animals; but the purpose of this verse, Paul says, is not to relate to oxen.

Verse 10, "Or saith He it altogether for our sakes?"...Yes, "For our sakes, no doubt, this is written." Stop right there. When God wrote that, He wasn't really talking about oxen. He was talking about people, and it's, incidentally, in...in Deuteronomy 25, there's no mention of animals anyway. It's talking about social and economic relationships between men; and it just puts this one in a metaphor. Men oughta be able to earn their living from their labor. Simple principle. If God requires that an ox, spending his strength serving man, should get his reward, how much more a man who spends his strength serving God? If an ox shouldn't be muzzled, why should a man of God? Why should a minister? And, you know, there's a built-in incentive, too, I think in this. I think when a man gains his

living out of his labor, it may tend to make his labor all the more diligent...

I think sometimes that when a person in Christian service has to go out and earn his living, and he knows that in his Christian service he's not earning his living, he tends to be slothful there, because his success is not really that significant in terms of accruing to himself earthly benefit, and so that's a simple Biblical principle.

And now look at verse 10 again. He says, "This is written...pick it up right in the third line there...This is written: that he that plows should plow in hope." In other words, the guy plowing the field oughta be able to hope that, out of his plowing, he's gonna gain a reward. "He that threshes in hope should be a partaker of his hope." In other words, he should be working, realizing there was gonna come something in the future. He'd have a hope for something in the future, and, indeed, it would come. Hope for the servant. Applying this to himself, Paul is simply saying this. "I oughta be able, and so should every missionary and every pastor and every minister, we oughta be able to labor with the anticipation that, out of that labor, is gonna come our financial need. That outta the labor is gonna come reward. That outta that labor is gonna come provision. We shouldn't have to have additional provision other than that."

Now, Paul makes a direct application, verse 11. "If we...and this is really straight...if we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a big deal if we reap your material things?" Now, that's an interesting statement. He says, "Look, Corinthians, if we sowed unto you the things of the Spirit, life-transforming things, eternal things, forever things, is it any big deal that you would give back to us some material things?"

It's an obvious question, isn't it? No, I mean it's no big deal. But so many times the mentality of Christians in history has been, "Make sure the servant of God can barely make it. Don't give them too much. After all, they're serving God." And ra...you say, "My philosophy on the thing is, 'Hey, if he's serving God, I mean what higher calling? Give him a whole bunch.'" Sometimes somebody'll come to speak somewhere, and I may be in the discussion, and they'll say, "Well, let's see, it'd be gas to his car, rejbuhbuh. And we'll need to kick this around in some group somewhere. We're talking about a camp or a conference with difference pastors or something. Somebody'll say, "Well, it'll only cost rububububub. Well, let's see, we'll give him extra fif. Oh, he can get away for $150.00." And I'll usually say, "Well, that'll be good. Let's give him $350.00." "Ahhhhh, what...what's he gonna do with the extra?" What would you do with the extra? "Oh, well, let's see, I'd buy the, fix, pay my bill." That's what he'll do with the extra...

You see, the point is not just, you know, make sure he never has enough, but give him more than he needs, and then you let him worry about how he's a steward of it. You let him... generosity...You know, we think about a missionary and, invariably, you know, you say, "Well, we don't wanna...don't wanna overdo it. After all, they're only missionaries." And the missionary comes home, and you say,

"My brother, I...I know you need a new suit, and I've got one here that I don't wear anymore. It's...it's peg-legged and it's double-breasted, and, really, brother, I got...I got these real thin ties that you'll just love; and let's face it. The Zulus don't know the difference, right?"

In your income tax, you write off $45.00 suit given to missionary. Hum, real good. Real good...Yeah, what you oughta do is take him down and buy him one just like he'd like to have, and then you worry about how he's a steward of the suit you gave him. Don't you worry about keeping him poor; but I think somehow the reason we feel this way is because it's been misused, and because we're...we're stewards, too, aren't we? And we wanna make sure that we're being a steward and not, you know, putting our money into something that isn't really right.

So there's that balance there. But, boy, the...the only attitude is the attitude of generosity. Look with me at 2 Corinthians chapter 8; 2 Corinthians chapter 8, this is just really super. I'd like to just meet with some of these people who were in on this, because I think they must be the sweetest people just in...in temperament and in attitude. But here were a...a group of very poor Christians in Macedonia, verse...verse 1. Churches of Macedonia. Now, these people were really poor. I mean they were destitute. They had nothing...and look at what happened.

Verse 2, "In a great trial of affliction," now, they were under persecution. They were in difficult times. They didn't have anything, "But the abundance of their joy," they were so thrilled with spiritual realities, they were so blessed by what the ministers of God had given to them, they were so happy in their Christian life that, out of their deep poverty, abounded riches. Do you see it there? "Out of the deep poverty abounded the riches of their liberality." Here they were, just as poor as anything. They were just as destitute as they could be; but when they all got together, out of that deep poverty came riches, and they pooled all their resources to give to the servants of God; and Paul says, "Lemme tell you something, folks...in verse 3... I...lemme be witness, I bear witness that beyond their ability or their power, they were willing."

I mean it was way beyond what they could've given. It was way beyond what the budget allowed. I mean they weren't just saying, "Well, how much have we got in the budget? We don't wanna overdo it. We might get in..." They just...they gave way beyond what they could've given. They gave what they didn't have and couldn't replace; and you know what the reaction of the man of God was? "I can't take that. We can't accept that. Why, you can't give me that. I don't need that much. That's...that's too much."

But look at verse 4. What's the first word? "Beseeching or begging us with much entreaty that we would receive...what?...the gift." They said, "No, no, no, we want you to have it." "Oh, I can't take - that's too..." "No, we want you to have it. Please take it." "But I mean it's all you have. You're so poor. I only want..." Do you see the spirit of Macedonian church? You know where this spirit comes from? It comes from verse 5, watch this. "And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave

themselves to the Lord and then unto us by the...what?...the will of God." How do you think God wills that you give? How do you think God wills that the church give to somebody? Abundantly, wouldn't you think? Liberally. More than you have. Out of deep poverty to give riches of liberality, to super-abound; and then if they say, "I can't take that," beg them to take it; and when they take that, you can say, "We first gave ourselves to the Lord, and it was His will that we give that way."

It's always God's will that we be generous. It's always God's will. Listen. Who is the greatest example of giving that ever was? God who gave His unspeakable gift. Would you say it was generous? How much giving? How much giving could He give? He could...He gave everything. How much grace did God give? All grace. How much mercy? All mercy. What kind of inheritance do you as a Christian inherit? All things. You see, God only knows one way to give, and that's generously. God never gives Christians just enough grace to get by so you don't fall into hell. Just enough mercy so you don't, you know...No. God's all grace, all sufficiency, all mercy. You're complete in Him. "You lack nothing pertaining to life in godliness," Peter said; and that's what God says is the pattern; and that's my will; and that's how you oughta give. If you see somebody who has a need, don't give just enough to get by. Give him more than you give, more than you thought you could give...

See, in verse 7, he says, "You abound in everything. You abound in faith." And that came from God. "You abound in utterance." That's from God. "You abound in knowledge." That's from God. "You abound in diligence, and you abound in love. See that you abound in this grace also." What grace? The grace of giving that he's talking about. If God's gonna give all this, then that's the way you oughta give.

Look at chapter 9 there, and verse 6. Remember this verse? Second Corinthians 9:6? "This I say: He who sows sparingly shall reap...what?...sparingly. He who sows bountifully shall reap bountifully." Now, I think this refers to my giving to the Lord in the church; but I think it refers to the church is giving back to the man of God. You wanna be blessed as a church? Be generous. You wanna be blessed as a church, be generous. Be generous to missionaries. Be generous to ministers. Be generous to those who minister and labor among you, as well as those guests that come and minister in our midst. Generosity oughta be the mark of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ, because they first gave themselves to Him.

In Philippians chapter 4, the Philippians had sent Paul a... a lotta money; and he says, "I didn't want this money. In fact, I don't need it. You gave me way too much; but I...I'm glad you sent it. You know why? Because it shows the mark of your spirituality; and because you've given more than you should have given, my God shall supply...what?...all your needs according to His riches." You can't out give God, and the liberality and the generosity that those Philippians and those Macedonians extended toward the apostles was something very, very pleasing to God; and that's the way it ought to be.

So Paul's saying, "Hey...back to 1 Corinthians 9...I have a right to ask for funds. No. 1, I'm an apostle, and I have that freedom. No. 2, that's human custom...verse 7...No. 3, it's the law of God." And then he gives No. 4, and I'm just gonna mention this briefly to you. No. 4 reason to support the ministry is it was done to others. Paul says in verse 12, "If others be partakers of this right over you, are not we also? If other people receive this, shouldn't we? Shouldn't we receive it as well as the others?" There had been precedent, you see, Apollos, one of the other pastors there; Peter undoubtedly was being supported by them; many others surely were being supported. He's saying, "Everybody else is receiving it, shouldn't we?" And especially since Paul was the founder of the church and their one spiritual father.

Now, we'll go back to...to the second part of verse 12 next week. Let's look at verse 13 and see the fifth reason. The fifth reason for supporting the ministry is that this is the universal pattern. This is the universal religious pattern. Verse 13, "Do you not know," and this is God-ordained, too. This is right out of God's law. "Do you not know that they who minister about holy things live of the temple, and they who wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?" What's he saying there? He's saying it's always been God's way that God's priests were supported by their priesthood.

For example, a priest is in the temple; and people are bringing offerings, the Old Testament. The man would...would bring a burnt offering. There were five different offerings that the Jews would bring. Let's say he'd bring a burnt offering. Now, this alone was the one that was totally burned up. The only thing left would be, according to Genesis 32, the stomach, the entrails, and the sinew from the thigh, and that you wouldn't particularly want. But what was left out of the burnt offering was the hide, and the priests would take the hides, and they would use those hides to sell to make money to live. So out of the burnt offering came the hide of the animal. The second offering that the Jews gave was the sin offering. Only the fat was burned, and the priest kept all the rest of the meat. The third offering was the trespass offering. The same thing, the fat was burned. The priest kept the rest of the meat. There was the meal offering, where they brought flour and wine and oil. A small token of it was burned. The rest of it went to the priest. The peace offering, which is the fifth one, where the fat and the entrails were burned. The priest received the breast and the...they said the right shoulder, and that all has symbolic meaning; and all the rest of it went back to the worshipper.

So in every case, there was something for the priest in order that his livelihood and his support and his sustenance might come out of his service. The priest received the first fruits of barley, wheat, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, honey, all of those things. Some of the first fruits of everybody's crop had to go to the priesthood to support them in the Old Testament. They received one-tenth of the Levites tithe. They received what was called the teruma, which was the one-fiftieth of any crop. They received what was called the kallah, and that had...that had to do with dough. When anybody made bread, one-twenty-fourth of the batch had to go to the priest. If you were a baker, one-forty-eighth, 'cause you were making more bread.

And so the priest in the Old Testament, according to these truths, and you can find them in Numbers 18, Deuteronomy 18, and many places, they were sustained by their ministry; and so he says in verse 13, "Don't you know that those who minister about holy things live of the temple, and those who serve the altar are partakers with the altar?" In other words, the support comes right out of that ministry. Simple truth. So he says, "I have liberty to ask for support. No. 1, I'm an apostle. No. 2, it's human custom. No. 3, it's the law of God. No. 4, you've had precedents...verse 12...you've done it to others; and No. 5, that's the way the priests of the Old Testament did it." But now, climactically, No. 6, and we'll close with this one, he says, "I have right to ask for support, because the Lord Jesus...ordained it. The Lord Jesus ordained it."

"Even so...verse 14...hath the Lord ordained that they who preach the Gospel should...what?...live of the Gospel." Now, people, that verse has been so misconstrued, it's terrible. You hear people say, "If you preach the Gospel, you should live of the Gospel." In other words, your life oughta match your sermon. You know, that's true. Your life ought to match your sermon; but that's not what this is saying. It's saying is this, "They who preach the Gospel should derive their living from the preaching of the Gospel." Support the preacher. Support the man of God. Support the missionary. This is the Word of our Lord. The Lord ordained it. This is not human reason. This is not just Old Testament proverb. This has been reiterated by the Lord Himself.

You say, "When was that?" I don't know. Maybe Paul is making an allusion to...to Matthew 10 where the Lord talked about the support of the two that went out, the seventy that went out, two by two; but probably this is just a direct statement from the Lord that came to Paul. The Lord ordained that, "They who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel."

Paul says, "My beloved Corinthians, I'm just as free as you are; and I have a right to ask you for support; but...but.." Look at verse 12 in the middle. "Nevertheless we have not used this right." Look at verse 15. "But I have used none of these things." Stop there. Paul gave six reasons why he had a right to be supported, and then he said, "But I didn't use any of 'em. I never took anything from you, even though I had a right to do it. You know why? Love for you limited the exercise of that liberty. I felt that it would be a hindrance, and so I didn't take the right that I had." And that, people is his principle here. As Christians, we have rights, rights that can be defended. I mean that's a tremendous defense of his right, isn't it, but a right that equally can be set aside.

Beloved, as we...as we live with each other, and as we love each other, and as we serve each other in the church, and as we remember the world around us, one of the things we have to do is this. We have to recognize that there are some things that aren't wrong to do in themselves; but they are offensive; and, thus, they become wrong for us; and sometimes we have to limit our liberty for love's sake; but it's a small price to pay; because I would think to myself that the joy experienced in loving my brother would be infinitely superior to the joy in exercising my liberty to the harm of my brother.

Wouldn't you? Let's pray.

Father, we just thank You for our time this morning, and I know that this message has been really different; and not easy from my heart, because it could be misrepresented; but I just pray, Lord, that Your Holy Spirit would be our teacher. I wanna thank You for everybody who's here this morning. Some know and love You with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Some just beginning to...to love You, and some as yet are on the outside kind of looking in; and maybe, as we've talked about the generosity of Christians and the love that we're to share and how we're to respond to each other by generosity, maybe it's just giving 'em a little glimpse of the beauty of the Christian experience. We pray, Father, that those who are Christians would find their...their hearts touched by these truths; and how to apply them might come directly from Your Spirit. Those that aren't Christians might get a glimpse of the standard of Christian life that's so unusual in this world...and they might be drawn to Christ. We pray that we might search our hearts to find these truths that apply to us and that we might be different because we've been here. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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