

WHAT ABOUT MY NEEDS? 1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-27

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Following the section on the weaker brother, Paul wants to further encourage the Corinthians to forfeit their rights for the sake of other Christians. In this section, Paul described his entire ministry as one of sacrifice and accommodation to others. He presented himself as an example of deference to others, demonstrating that he did not ask things of others that he was not willing to do himself to a greater extent.

WE'VE GOT EVERY RIGHT (9:1-14)

Paul had just told the Corinthians not to eat meat offered to idols for the sake of the weaker Christians (8:1-13). He had insisted that Christians often have to forfeit their rights, even those based on truth, in loving service to others. Here, he continued this argument by affirming his own rights — rights that the Corinthians knew he had forfeited.

9:1-2. Paul began his discussion of forfeiting rights with a series of four questions to which he expected a positive response. He asked if it were not true that he was **free** and **an apostle**. Apostles were central leaders of the church; they and the prophets were the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). Consequently, certain rights and freedoms came with the office. In a very powerful sense, Paul was in charge of the church, not the other way around. Paul also asked if it were not true that he had **seen Jesus** on the road to Damascus and in the Arabian Desert (Acts 9:3-8; 26:12-18; Gal. 1:12-17). No one should have doubted that he met the requirements of apostleship mentioned in Acts 1:21-22. Paul directed the final question to the Corinthians themselves, reminding them that they had come to Christ by Paul's own **work in the Lord**. The church at Corinth directly resulted from Paul's ministry (Acts 16:1-11). Those unfamiliar with Paul might have had grounds to doubt reports about him, but the Corinthians knew the truth because they themselves were **the seal**, or proof, of Paul's **apostleship in the Lord**.

These questions indicate that Paul's opposition in Corinth (see 1:12; 3:4,21; 4:3) may have challenged the authenticity of his apostleship. Paul had converted them (compare 4:15). Moreover, the power of the Holy Spirit had so attended his preaching in Corinth (2:4-5), that the Corinthians should have respected Paul's apostleship.

Elsewhere Paul even called the Corinthian believers his letter of recommendation (2 Cor. 3:2). Their conversion certainly should have been sufficient to satisfy the Corinthians in this regard.

9:3. Paul was about to give a **defense** against people who sat **in judgment** on him. To understand his defense, one must first understand the accusation. From the preceding and following contexts (chapters 8 and 10), it would appear that some people were displeased with Paul's refusal to eat meat sacrificed to idols. They particularly did not like his teaching that others should do the same. Those judging Paul knew that he understood the practice was theologically justifiable — it was a freedom that every knowledgeable, mature Christian had. To them it must have seemed that Paul contradicted the straightforward truth when he insisted that stronger Christians should not eat for the sake of weaker Christians.

To defend his actions, Paul drew upon the larger practices of his life. His position on eating meat sacrificed to idols was not a sign of weakness or inconsistency. Rather, it accorded with the basic, Christian, moral principles that guided his entire life. For this reason, the Corinthians who opposed him on the matter of meat sacrificed to idols needed to take another look at the issue. They actually opposed the very fabric of Christian ethics.

9:4-6. Paul introduced his defense through a series of questions and considerations, establishing a set of true premises about the apostolic ministry (9:4-12a). First, he asked questions directly about himself and Barnabas (9:4-6). The answers to these questions are so obvious that one can easily sense Paul's sarcasm.

1. Did he and Barnabas **have the right to food and drink** as they ministered? Yes.
2. Did he and Barnabas **have the right** to have **believing** wives with them like **other apostles**? Yes.
3. Were he and Barnabas the only apostles not worthy of pay for their work? No.

Evidently, those who sat in judgment against Paul thought that his refusal to take advantage of these rights proved that he actually lacked these rights. They apparently reasoned that he did not take these advantages because he was not truly an apostle.

To counter this thinking, Paul affirmed his apostolic rights. Even though he supported himself making tents (Acts 18:3), he had a right to be fed and paid by the Corinthians. Similarly, even though he remained single for the sake of those to whom he ministered (1 Cor. 7:7-8), he had a right to be married. That Paul mentioned marriage as a right that he had forfeited indicates that he thought it to be a blessing, not a hindrance to spiritual living. He declined marriage because his singleness advanced his particular ministry more than his marriage would have, perhaps because

he could not easily afford to support a family while declining to receive payment for his ministry.

9:7. Paul led up to the question of why he and Barnabas did not take advantage of what they had rights to enjoy. Before he reached that point, however, he built his case even more strongly. He appealed not only to the example of the other church leaders, but also to common daily life.

1. Does any soldier serve at his own expense? No.
2. Do farmers rightfully eat from their produce? Yes.
3. Do shepherds rightfully drink milk from their flocks? Yes.

No one would object to these people receiving their livelihood from their work. Common sense dictates that people have a right to make a living from their work. By appealing to these ordinary life analogies, Paul continued to assert his rights, and thereby led to questions surrounding his and Barnabas' refusal to take advantage of these rights.

9:8-10. Finally, Paul asked a very serious question. Were these expectations **merely from a human point of view**, or did God confirm them as well? Paul insisted that God agreed to these rights, and that Scripture proved the point. He asked, **“Doesn't the Law say the same thing?”** Paul believed that Old Testament Law actually undergirded his moral right to receive a livelihood from his ministry. To support his argument, Paul quoted Deuteronomy 25:4, **“Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.”**

In biblical times, at least two methods of treading grain were practiced. At times, stalks of grain were spread out over a flat hard surface called a threshing floor. Oxen or horses dragged a heavily weighted board across the grain by walking around and around a central post. At other times, the animals simply walked on top of the grain with their feet. In all events, Old Testament law did not allow farmers to muzzle the treading animals. God's law permitted the animals to eat as they worked.

Paul applied this Old Testament law to the issue at hand, insisting that **God was concerned** about more than oxen. God said this **for us** (i.e. human beings). The NASB (**altogether for our sake**) and NRSV (**entirely for our sake**) are a bit misleading in this case, suggesting that this Old Testament law did not really intend to provide for the care of animals. The NIV translation **“surely”** is to be preferred. Paul knew that the Law pertained to actual oxen treading grain (God is concerned about animals, compare Jonah 4:11), but also that a deeper moral principle undergirded this law. He summarized the principle in this way: **when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in hope of sharing in the harvest.**

9:11-12. With biblical support for his views, Paul returned to his own situation. Since he and Barnabas had **sown spiritual seed** in Corinth, they had every right to **reap a material harvest** of reasonable pay for their work. This passage is rightly used today to support the idea that ministers of the gospel should be paid for their efforts. Paul argued here that the Corinthians directly benefited from his and Barnabas' ministry. For this reason, he and Barnabas had a **right to support** even greater than the other church leaders whom the Corinthians evidently supported.

In verse 12b the apostle briefly hinted at the forfeiture of these rights of which he was to talk in later verses. He and Barnabas had every right to be paid, **but** they did **not use this right**. Instead, they **put up with** all kinds of troubles **rather than** do anything that would **hinder the gospel of Christ**. Paul was to repeat and elaborate on this statement in 9:15. In the meantime, he returned to one more argument supporting his rights.

9:13-14. In a final effort to demonstrate the absolute doctrinal correctness of his right to be paid, Paul noted that in the Old Testament the priests and Levites got **their food from the temple** and shared **in what** was **offered on the altar**. He concluded that, **in the same way, the Lord** (not mere humans) **has commanded that those who preach . . . should receive their living from the gospel**. This may also be a reference to Jesus' instructions to the apostles in Matthew 10:10 or to the seventy-two in Luke 10:7. Paul's conclusion could hardly have been put in stronger terms.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the force of Paul's argument here. He created a watertight case for the fact that he should be paid for his apostolic ministry. Common fairness supported him. Current social practices agreed with his contention. Most importantly, the Old Testament Law itself clearly taught his view. No principial reason existed that Paul should not be paid. This was the only logical conclusion a knowledgeable and right-thinking person could deduce.

WE GIVE UP OUR RIGHTS (9:15-27)

Having established his right to earn a living from the gospel, Paul explained that he did not take advantage of this rights so that he might not hinder his gospel efforts. Just as he forfeited his right to be paid so that the gospel might have greater success, the Corinthians should forfeit their rights to eat meat sacrificed to idols so as not to injure weaker brothers and sisters.

9:15. Paul boldly declared, **"I have not used any of these rights."** He had forfeited his right to making an honest living from his ministry, but he quickly countered any misunderstandings of his motivations in building such a strong case. He had not defended his rights in order that the Corinthians might begin to pay him, but rather to defend his apostleship (9:1-3).

Literally, the statement “**I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast**” is not a single sentence. In the original language, the phrase “**I would rather die than**” is an incomplete exclamation that is interrupted by another statement “No one will **deprive me of this boast**.” On occasion Paul could not complete sentences because his emotions overcame him (see Rom. 3:25; 5:12; 8:32; 1 Cor 6:9; 10:32). This was one such instance. He could not finish his sentence because he was overwhelmed by how important preaching the gospel was to him. He would never allow anyone to **deprive** him of the **boast** that he preached voluntarily — it was his reason for living.

9:16-17. Paul wanted very much to continue the practice of preaching without pay. He explained that he could not **boast** (in the good sense of the word — see 9:15) simply because he preached the gospel. He insisted, “**I am compelled to preach**.” In other words, he had no choice. God had called him to preach (Acts 9:15-16; 22:14-15; 26:16-18), and he had to fulfill that obligation or fall under divine judgment (**woe**) (compare 9:27).

How did Paul enhance his preaching ministry? He preached **voluntarily** so that he might receive **a reward**. Paul frequently spoke of himself and of other Christians being motivated to service by a desire for reward and praise (Rom. 2:29; 1 Cor. 3:8,14; 4:5; Gal. 6:4-10; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:24). Eternal reward motivated him as it should all believers (Matt. 6:19-21). Paul did not want to lose his eternal rewards for preaching willingly and eagerly, and without pay. If he preached begrudgingly or received pay, he believed he would be doing nothing more than **simply discharging the trust committed to him**. To raise his preaching above the level of mere obedience, Paul voluntarily gave up his right to remuneration.

9:18. To sum up the matter, Paul asked what his **reward** was. This verse presents a number of complexities. If one follows the majority of English translations and reads the verse as a question and answer, then two understandings are possible. First, many interpreters have understood Paul to say that preaching was a reward in itself. To preach the gospel **free of charge** and in so doing **not to make use of his rights** for pay was sufficient reward. But in the light of 9:17, it seems better to understand Paul in another way. The second interpretation is that Paul knew he would one day receive a reward for having preached without remuneration. The benefit of a special reward from Christ would come to Paul because he did not seek his own benefit in this world.

Nevertheless, this verse may not be a question and answer at all. It may also be translated entirely as a question. The verse would thus read, “What then is my reward so that, when I preach the gospel, I may offer it free of charge so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel?” That is, Paul may simply have been asking what great reward motivated him to forfeit his rights by offering the gospel free of charge. In this case, his answer would come in 9:23: “**I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.**”

9:19. As a missionary in the Mediterranean world, Paul had to deal with many different cultural standards. In these varying circumstances, he committed himself not to exercise his right to pursue the norms of his own cultural preferences, and not to insist on his freedoms under the gospel. This argument is very much like his forfeiture of his right to eat meat in 8:13.

The apostle began this discussion with a strong assertion: **I am free and belong to no man.** Paul was a freeman. In fact, he was a citizen of Rome. In the ancient world, a slave had very few rights to pursue his own desires. Masters dictated most of what their slaves did. But Paul was not legally obligated to conform his own desires to a master or slave owner. By this assertion of his free status, Paul once again stated an indisputable truth. He was free and did not have to conform himself to the preferences of others.

Nevertheless, Paul voluntarily made himself **a slave to everyone.** He gave up his rights to his own preferences in order to serve other people. Why did he do this? He did it **to win as many as possible,** to further the kingdom of Christ. The desire to see many people come to faith in Christ overrode Paul's desire for his self-determining rights.

9:20-21. To illustrate just how far he was willing to follow this policy, Paul described two extremes of his multi-cultural ministry. First, he ministered **to those under the law and to those not having the law,** i.e. **Jews** and Gentiles. In the ancient world, the differences between these two groups could be enormous. Clothing, holidays, eating habits, religious beliefs, family practices, etc. were often very different between Jews and Gentiles. This diversity required great flexibility from Paul because he wanted **to win those under the law and to win those not having the law.**

Paul's description of these groups was not precisely symmetrical. He did not speak of those who had the law versus those who did not have it. Rather, he spoke of those who were **under the law and those not having the law.**

"Under the law," on the one hand, was Paul's technical terminology for people under the curse of the law because they sought justification before God through obedience to the law of Moses (Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 3:23; 4:5,21; 5:18). Paul understood the ways of Jews who sought to find favor with God through obedience to the law. They did not merely have the law, but they actually became its victims because reliance on obedience to the law always leads to frustration and further failure. Even so, many Jews in Paul's day were so committed to this lifestyle that they filled their lives with all kinds of biblical and extrabiblical observances of law. Although Paul knew that these practices had nearly condemned him to God's judgment early in his life (Rom. 7:8-11), he cared so much about the Jewish community that he observed their customs and laws when he was with them so that the gospel might have opportunity to take root in them.

On the other hand, “**not having the law**” meant that the Gentiles by and large were “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). They did not have the extensive rules of Scripture, but followed pagan rituals and lifestyles free of Jewish biblical and extrabiblical restrictions. Although Paul did not approve of all pagan lifestyles, he observed their customs and laws when he was among them so that the gospel might spread among the Gentiles.

Paul was very flexible as he went from one community to another, but he knew where to draw the line. When he was with religious Jews, he always remembered that he did not seek justification through the Law and was not subject to its curse (**though I myself am not under the law**). Paul did not allow himself to buy into the beliefs of the religious Jews to whom he ministered. He did not return to the entanglements of legalism.

Likewise, when with Gentiles who did not observe the laws of Scripture, Paul conformed his outward behavior to theirs in many ways, but always remembered that he was bound to keep the law in Christ (**though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law**). Paul did not stray into paganism. Rather, he strongly asserted his obligation to **God’s law** insofar as he was **under Christ’s law**.

Christ’s law is not opposed to the law of Moses. Jesus himself said, “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). Christ’s law is the moral teachings of all the Scriptures as they were taught by Christ and his apostles. Paul often affirmed that God’s law was designed as a guide for Christians (Rom. 2:26-29; 3:31; 5:20-6:2; 7:12,14,16,22,25; 8:7; 1 Tim. 1:8). Yet, here he made explicit that God’s law for Christians is interpreted in the light of Christ’s coming, and thus has become **Christ’s law**. In all events, Paul drew the line in his service to others at sin. He sought to help others by becoming like them, but he refused to fall into sin for the sake of others.

9:22. Paul added another class of people to whom he condescended besides Jews and Gentiles, one that drew attention to his concern for the Corinthian church: **the weak**. The strong and knowledgeable people in the Corinthian church refused to make allowances for the weak among them. The strong insisted on eating meat sacrificed to idols because they correctly understood their freedom to do so (8:9-12), but thereby sinned against weaker brothers and sisters. In contrast to them, Paul **became weak** by willingly conforming his behavior to that of **the weak**. By limiting his freedom in this way, Paul made certain that he did not cause weaker brothers and sisters to fall into sin. The principle of service to others applies even to those who do not understand matters such as freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

In summary, Paul claimed that he had **become all things to all men**. With the qualifications he had given in the preceding verses, Paul refused to insist on his rights to pursue his own preferences. He submitted to everyone **so that by all possible**

means he might bring some to salvation. Paul's chief concern was to build the kingdom of Christ through the conversion of the lost. He refused to allow his own freedoms to prevent others from following the ways of Christ. In this regard he exemplified in his own life the principle with which he began this section: knowledge alone **puffs up** and makes a person not care about the well-being of others, but **love edifies** (8:1). Love for others leads a person to do those things that will bring as many as possible into the kingdom of Christ.

9:23. Paul was motivated was for the sake of other people, and **for the sake of the gospel**. That is, Paul was concerned to see the good news of salvation in Christ proclaimed and believed throughout the world, and the kingdom of God come in full. He made himself the servant of all in order to further these ends. Yet, Paul's motivation for this course of action was not entirely altruistic. He knew that God would reward him for his service, and sacrificed his own rights **so that he might share** in the gospel's **blessings**.

It is important to remember that Paul did not fear that he would lose the salvation freely given to him in Christ. In his view, it was not possible to lose salvation genuinely attained through God-given faith. Yet, he knew that it was possible for many who claimed and served Christ to turn away from Christ and show that they were never truly saved at all (Matt. 13:20-21; 24:10; Mark 4:17; Luke 8:13; John 2:23-24; Acts 20:29-30; Phil. 2:12-15; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 6:4-9; 10:26-29,39; 2 Pet. 1:10; 3:16-17; 1 John 2:19). Paul did not want that to happen to him.

Paul's last words raised the stakes tremendously in the matter of meat sacrificed to idols. No longer was it a matter of mere choice, but a matter of loving service of the knowledgeable toward the weak. Sacrificing one's technical rights for the sake of the edification and salvation of others was no small matter. Those who pursue their own rights even when such pursuit results in the destruction of the weak (8:11) reveal the true condition of their hearts. Service to others has tremendous ramifications for those who claim to follow Christ. As the apostle John put it, "Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). The strong and knowledgeable at Corinth were correct in their understanding as far as it went, but they had forgotten how essential love for others was. Disregarding the weak in the Corinthian church would eventually bring the judgment of God.

9:24-25. Paul next turned to an analogy that illustrated just how serious this matter was. He appealed to the athletic event of **a race**. Because of the Corinthians' sponsorship and familiarity with the Isthmian Games, the analogy of a **race** spoke to an experience that Paul had shared with the Corinthian believers (see Deeper Discoveries). Paul drew several comparisons between the Christian life and a race.

First, not everyone wins, just as not everyone who begins the Christian life endures to the end (see 9:23). Therefore, everyone who claims to be a Christian must always **run . . . to get the prize**. Clearly, this does not mean that only one person ever will be

saved, but rather that Christians must be “eager to do what is good” (Tit. 2:14) and that genuine faith must be accompanied by good works (Eph. 2:10; Jas. 2:17).

Second, every athlete **goes into strict training** (“exercises self-control in all things” NRSV, NASB). Christians must devote themselves to self-denial, such as forfeiting their rights for the sake of weaker brothers and sisters, and to spiritual development and self-discipline.

Third, unlike athletes who work hard **to get a crown that will not last**, a ceremonial wreath, Christians will receive **a crown that will last forever** (compare 2 Tim. 4:8; Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4). By this latter crown Paul referred to eternal rewards such as everlasting life, not to temporal blessings. Christians endure for eternal glory (Rom. 2:7; 2 Cor. 4:17; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 5:10).

9:26-27. Paul drew some moral implications (**therefore**) for his life from the foregoing analogy. First, he did not live his Christian life **like a man running aimlessly**. He had a definite goal — winning the prize (9:24) — and he ran to achieve it.

Second, shifting the analogy slightly, Paul commented that he did **not fight like a man beating the air**. Later, in a letter to Timothy, Paul again metaphorically wrote of running and boxing for the purpose of gaining a crown (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Here, he pointed out his care not to miss with his “spiritual punches.”

Third, he declared his determination to **beat his body** (literally, to give himself a “black eye”). Paul did not mean that he actually afflicted or beat his body, a practice which he condemned (Col. 2:23), but still spoke metaphorically. When boxers fight vigorously they usually end up with bruises. Paul probably meant that he followed Christ so vigorously that it sometimes caused him physical harm, such as being lashed, beaten with rods, stoned and shipwrecked (2 Cor. 11:24-25).

Fourth, he made his body his **slave**, a metaphor describing the rigor of his spiritual life. He conditioned himself spiritually, denying himself as athletes deny themselves for the sake of winning the contest (compare Tit. 2:12).

Paul concluded this athletic analogy by restating the ultimate goal of all of his spiritual training and discipline. He worked as hard as he did to make sure that **after** he had **preached to others**, he would **not be disqualified for the prize**. Again, Paul did not speak of losing salvation (see 9:23). Yet, he was aware that even he could fall away from Christ and prove he had never truly been regenerated. Paul knew that the **prize** is received only by those who endure to the end (compare 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 21:7).

In this analogy the apostle spoke generally about his entire spiritual life — he lived like an athlete in every area of it. In the context of this chapter, however, the more immediate reference of the analogy is the way Paul denied himself his rights for the

sake of others. Self-denial in service to others is a difficult practice. Yet, Paul knew that it was necessary if he wanted to attain the prize of eternal life. By implication, the same is true of every believer, just as it was true of the knowledgeable ones in the Corinthian church. Paul used himself as an example for them to follow. If he, an apostle, was willing make such sacrifices, the Corinthians should have been willing as well. Moreover, their failure to care for the weaker brothers and sisters called their very salvation into question. They needed to run harder in their spiritual race by denying themselves for the sake of others.

DIGGING DEEPER

A. Apostle (9:1,2,5)

When reading these verses, one naturally questions whether or not Barnabas was an apostle. The modern tendency is to equate the term “apostle” with one of “the twelve,” with the subsequent addition of Paul. This position understands “apostle” as an office, and accords well with most of the New Testament uses — particularly with those that describe the qualifications of an apostle (1 Cor. 9:1,2; 15:7-8; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 1:1). The qualifications appear to include: seeing the Lord Jesus; working signs, wonders, and miracles; and being commissioned by God himself. Acts 1:20-26 also suggests the existence of the office of apostle, and the qualification of having been with the original apostles from the beginning. The immediately evident problem with this last qualification is that it excludes Paul.

Other passages, however, call people beyond the limited circle of the twelve and Paul “apostle,” namely: Andronicus, Junias (Rom. 16:7); Barnabas (1 Cor. 9:5-6); unnamed brethren (2 Cor. 8:23); James (Gal. 1:19); Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25); and Silas and Timothy (1 Thess. 2:6-7 with 1:1). It cannot be possible that all these others fulfilled the aforementioned requirements because Paul at least converted Timothy.

It would seem the most likely solution is that the word “apostle” was used in a variety of ways. Sometimes, it apparently referred to a miracle-working, authoritative, Christ-commissioned office, while at other times it seems to have referred to those commissioned and sent by the church for the work of the ministry or as messengers. Such a distinction is possibly reflected in the qualification of Paul and Peter as apostles of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1), while certain unnamed brethren are apostles, or messengers, of the churches (2 Cor. 8:23).

In 1 Corinthians 9:1-5, verses 1-2 seem to imply an official, authoritative apostleship. Given the context, and the lack of any indication that Paul changed his use of the word within the passage, a shift in meaning in verse 5 would be misleading at best. While verse 5 would seem to label Barnabas an apostle, the surrounding verses make clear that Paul’s point was to defend his own apostleship, not Barnabas’. As

such, it may well be that the phrase “other apostles” means “other than Paul” rather than “other than Paul and Barnabas.”

B. What then is my reward . . . ? (9:18)

This verse is best translated in its entirety as a single question: “What then is my reward so that, when I preach the gospel, I may offer it free of charge so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel?” Though this seems awkward in English, it makes better grammatical sense of the word *hina* (translated “that;” the NIV inserts “just this” to help the flow of the English). *Hina* is a conjunction which introduces subordinate clauses, so it is more proper to see the NIV’s answer (“**Just this . . . in preaching it**”) as a subordinate clause, making it part of the question itself.

C. Race, prize, crown, beat (9:24-27)

The Corinthians loved athletics, and sponsored the biannual Isthmian Games which were second in importance only to the Olympic Games. They held these games only ten miles from Corinth, so most people in Corinth not only would have been familiar with the goals and practices of the games, but also would have had the opportunity to observe them. Paul was in Corinth in A.D. 50-52, so he would have been present for the Isthmian Games held in the spring of A.D. 51.

The games included six events: wrestling, jumping, javelin and discus throwing, and, most importantly for Paul’s analogy, racing and boxing. Competitors in the Olympic Games were required to train for at least ten months prior to the games in order to qualify for participation. It is possible that a similar requirement existed for the Isthmian Games, which may explain Paul’s references to strict training (9:25) and disqualification (9:27). Winners received crowns either of pine or of wilted celery, both perishable materials.

D. Issues for Discussion

1. How did Paul prove his apostleship in this text? Why did he need to defend his apostleship? How did Paul’s apostleship make his sacrifices even greater?
2. Of all ministers, do only apostles have the right to be paid for their labors? Of all ministers, do only apostles have the right to marry? If other ministers have these rights, can these rights be proven from this text?
3. When should ministers be willing to give up their rights? When should Christians in general be willing to give up their rights?
4. How important are your rights to you? What rights would you be willing to give up to gain the opportunity to proclaim the gospel? What rights would you be willing to give up to keep from stumbling other Christians? In the past, have you ever given up your rights in order to keep from causing others to sin or in order

to proclaim the gospel? Have you ever insisted on your rights when you shouldn't have?

5. What does it mean to be "all things to all people"? In what areas should Christians be willing to change in order to be "all things"? In what areas would you not be willing to change? Are there changes you know you could make in your life that would help you be "all things" to someone in particular or to a group of people in general?
6. Would you say that a desire to be "all things to all people" characterizes your life? Do you have a passion for the lost? How do your current actions demonstrate this? What will you do in the future to bring the gospel to the lost?
7. How much effort do you put into being a Christian? Do you work as hard for the gospel as people training for the Olympics train to win a medal?
8. What did Paul say might happen to him if he failed to put every effort into advancing the gospel? Why did he say this? Do you share Paul's theology on this matter? Do you also share Paul's passion and drive in this matter? Do you work as hard for the gospel as Paul did? Is there a relationship between sharing Paul's theology, and sharing his passion and energy?
9. How does 1 Corinthians chapter 9 relate to the material in chapter 8? How does it relate to the material in chapter 10? Judging from what you know about the Corinthians from the rest of this letter, how do you think the Corinthian church would have responded to Paul's teaching in chapter 9?