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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

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**SO THAT WE CAUSE NO HINDRANCE TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST
 1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-18**

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 8:1 -11:1 is a section that deals with one overarching issue: Christians are most like Jesus when we joyfully set aside our rights for the sake of others. In chapter 8, Paul explained that the Corinthians must set aside the right to eat meat offered to idols in the presence of a weaker brother—a Christian who thinks that something is evil when it is not at all evil. In 1 Corinthians 8:13, Paul said *13Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.* Now in chapter 9, Paul offers himself as an example of the very principle he teaches; the necessity of loving and principles self-denial for the sake of other believers. His specific examples of self-denial include: abstaining from eating meat in the presence of weak Christians, refusing a salary from the Corinthian church and instead, doing manual labor to earn his income, and generally, a refusal to try to impress anyone with his own abilities [See 1 Corinthians 2:1-5].

Ironically, the Corinthian church misinterpreted Paul's self-denial as weakness, not spiritual maturity. In Corinthian culture, a renowned teacher would not sympathize with those who held weaker positions than his own. Furthermore, these teachers would have been paid well for their teaching; doing manual labor to support oneself would have proven that one was not properly equipped to be a teacher or philosopher. In short, the self-denial should have increased their confidence in Paul and his ministry caused them to question his Apostleship.

Understanding this context enables us to better understand 1 Corinthians 9. This is Paul's self-defense (v3) of his self-denial. This is Paul's living illustration of spiritual maturity as seen in direct contrast to the Corinthians false understanding of genuine spirituality.

1. PAUL DEMONSTRATES THAT A MATURE BELIEVER MUST HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS LAWFUL & WHAT IS UNLAWFUL [9:1-14]

The first 14 verses of this chapter teach us that Paul knew his lawful, God-given rights as an Apostle. God had given him freedom from living as a slave to men's opinions and preferences (v1). Additionally, the risen Christ appeared to Paul and called him to preach the gospel and the Corinthian church was the result of Paul's Apostleship (vv1-2). As an Apostle, Paul had certain rights that he lists in verses 3-14.

In each question posed here, Paul is reminding the Corinthians that he has the right to be materially provided for as an Apostle who founded the church. Again, this is because his refusal to take money from the church caused them to call his Apostleship into question. They detested his manual labor because it was seen as demeaning to both him and the church. But Paul did not refuse a salary to humiliate himself or the church, he has his reasons which will be explained. But for now, he must remind them, through asking penetrating questions, of his status and their

obligation. They have an obligation to provide food and drink (v4). They have an obligation to provide for a family if necessary (v5). They have an obligation to provide an adequate salary so that their teachers do not have to earn a living outside of their ministries (v6). If these truths are obvious for soldiers, farmers and shepherds, then they should be obvious for pastors as well (v7).

To stress that this right to be paid is not just a personal opinion, Paul appeals to the Old Testament Law, particularly the Law given to Moses (vv8-9). Having heard God say, "*YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING*" [Deuteronomy 25:4], Paul then asks, *God is not concerned about oxen, is He?* Paul means that if God was concerned that oxen benefit from their labor, then Apostles should as well. Paul insists that Deuteronomy 25:4 is wisdom for the church (vv10-12a). Those who labor among them should receive material benefits great enough to provide for their needs. In verse 13, Paul appeals to their religious traditions [both Christian and pagan] and finally, in verse 14, he appeals to the Lord Jesus to support his right to be paid.

Jesus sent out 70 preachers into various towns and he gave them numerous instructions, one of which was, *5 "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' 6 "If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. 7 "Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.* Jesus said that the man who labors in ministry should be compensated financially.

2. PAUL DEMONSTRATES THAT A MATURE BELIEVER MUST HAVE ONE OVERARCHING PRIORITY THAT SUPERSEDES HIS RIGHTS [9:12, 15-18]

Paul presented an overwhelming case concerning his right to be paid. Then he explains why he refused that right. The primary reason given is that he has an overarching priority that supersedes his rights. In verse 12, *If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.* Paul's priority was the gospel of Jesus Christ; he would knowingly do nothing that would hinder the gospel's advancement. Apparently, Paul thought taking money from the Corinthians would do just that.

Again, in verse 15, Paul refuses to take money from the Corinthians. In this verse he also reassures the Corinthians that he has no intention of taking their money. In verses 16-17, Paul reminds the Corinthians that Jesus chose him for the task of preaching and that this is the stewardship entrusted to him. He must do nothing to damage that stewardship. Rather than receiving pay, Paul's *reward* (v18) is his right to offer the gospel *without charge* because this gives him an opportunity to be an example of precisely what he is commanding the Corinthians to be: those who do not *make full uses of [their] rights*.

CONCLUSION

If we are to go on to maturity, we must become saturated in the Bible. We must know what is lawful and what is unlawful. In addition, love for one another must characterize and govern this knowledge. This allows our overarching priority, the gospel of Jesus Christ, to go forward without the hindrances that come through unloving arrogance. So our church should be increasingly characterized by knowledgeable and loving Christians who willingly set aside their rights when it benefits our weaker brothers and sisters. When we become this kind of church, the gospel will not be stifled by our arrogance or selfishness.

In this passage, I see 2 ways the spread of the gospel is hindered: (1) through unloving arrogance which does not consider the weaker conscience and (2) through an unlawful withholding of the tithe that God designed to support the men who spread the gospel. We have thoroughly covered the first hindrance, let us consider the second next week.