

1 CORINTHIANS 9:8–9A

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 9. In this chapter Paul asked a number of rhetorical questions to emphasize his rights as an apostle. He started in the first two verses by proving that he was an apostle. Then in verses 3 and following he began to defend his rights as an apostle. In verse 4 he asked, “Don’t we have the right to eat and drink?” The word “we” refers to both Paul and Barnabas, as we can see in verse 6. And here in verse 4 Paul was talking about their right to have daily nourishment. So the obvious answer is “yes.” They had the right as apostles to receive financial support from the Corinthian believers so that they could eat and drink without needing to do some other kind of work.

Then in verse 5 Paul asked another rhetorical question: “Don’t we have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife like the other apostles, the Lord’s brothers, and Cephas?” And once again the obvious answer is “yes.” Paul and Barnabas had the right to be married, which implies that they were single at that time. But they could have gotten married if they wanted to, as long as they married a believer. And Paul defended their freedom in this area by giving some examples. He referred to the other apostles, the Lord’s brothers, and Cephas. The Lord’s brothers were James, Joses, Judas, and Simon, and Cephas was another name for Peter. And Paul was saying that all of these men had a believing wife. But his point was that they had the right to take their wife with them as they traveled. And so they had the right to expect financial support for both themselves and their wife.

Then in verse 6 Paul asked yet another rhetorical question: “Or do only Barnabas and I have no right to refrain from working?” Now we know from other passages that Paul was a tentmaker, and Barnabas may have been as well. But either way he must have done some kind of work with his hands to support himself. And apparently they were the only apostles who did that. So Paul was basically asking whether they supported themselves because they didn’t have the right to refrain from working. And the answer to this question is “no.” They had the right to receive financial support, but they chose to work and support themselves anyway. Paul went on to explain why later in this chapter, but his point here was that he had the right to refrain from working, just like the other apostles.

Then in verse 7 Paul asked three more rhetorical questions: “Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Or who shepherds a flock and does not drink the milk from the flock?” So in this verse Paul gave three illustrations to defend his right to receive support as an apostle. And these three illustrations are focused on different situations in everyday life during the first century. The first one is a soldier, the second one is a farmer, and the third one is a shepherd. Paul asked one rhetorical question about each person, and the answer to each question is “no one.” No full-

time soldier has to pay his own way. All soldiers get enough money to cover their basic needs. And if a farmer plants a vineyard, then of course he had the right to eat some of the fruit. During Old Testament times an Israelite man didn't have to serve in the army if he had just planted a vineyard. He had the right to stay home and wait for some fruit to come so that he could enjoy it.

Then Paul talked about a shepherd. And his point was that anyone who watched over a flock had the right to drink some of the milk that came from the flock. So these three questions powerfully prove from everyday life that Paul had the right to receive financial support for his ministry as an apostle. But it's important to note that all three of these illustrations are referring to relatively lowly people in society. None of these people would have gotten rich through their occupations. Paul wasn't trying to argue that he should have gotten rich from his ministry as an apostle. He would not approve of all the Christian leaders today who have a huge salary and a luxurious lifestyle. Paul was only saying here that he had the right to have his basic needs met.

Now let's look at the next verse in 1 Corinthians 9. We're ready to cover some new material. Look at what Paul wrote in verse 8: "Am I saying this from a human perspective? Doesn't the law also say the same thing?" So in this verse we have two more rhetorical questions. We've already seen ten of them in this chapter, and now we're up to twelve of them. And we're going to see even more of them in the coming weeks. Now remember that a rhetorical question is one that has an obvious answer. So Paul wasn't asking all these rhetorical questions because he was looking for the answers. He was asking these questions because he wanted his readers to stop and think more deeply about what he was talking about.

So let's look more carefully at these two questions. In the first one Paul asked, "Am I saying this from a human perspective?" Now the Christian Standard Bible is missing a word here, and so are the English Standard Version and the Legacy Standard Bible. But thankfully the New American Standard Bible has this word. It's the word "not." The New American Standard Bible says, "I am not just asserting these things according to human judgment, am I?" Now that phrase "am I" at the end of the question doesn't come directly from the original Greek. But it's implied by the Greek word for not. This word is basically telling us how we should answer this question, just in case we aren't sure. The obvious answer to this question is "no." Paul was not saying this from a human perspective.

Now the word "this" comes from a Greek word that's neuter plural, and so it's more literally translated with the phrase "these things." That's what we see in the English Standard Version, the Legacy Standard Bible, and the New American Standard Bible. So Paul wasn't just talking about one thing here. He was talking about multiple things. But what exactly was he talking about when he used the phrase "these things"? Well, I think it's pretty obvious that he was referring back to all the questions that he asked in verses 4-7. He was talking about his right to receive financial support as an apostle. And in verse 7 we just saw that he gave three everyday illustrations to defend this right.

So it's easy to see how some people at this point might have thought that Paul's argument was weak. That's why he was quick to point out that he was not saying these things from a human perspective. Now the phrase "from a human perspective" comes from a Greek phrase that's more literally translated "ac-

cording to man.” But that phrase isn’t found in any translation that I looked at. Now the Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible have the phrase “according to human judgment,” which is closer. And there’s a footnote in the Legacy Standard Bible to show that the Greek word translated “human judgment” more literally means “man.” So the Legacy Standard Bible helps us to figure out the most literal translation here.

But what did Paul mean when he said “according to man”? Well, the Greek preposition here just introduces a standard. So Paul was basically saying that his comments in the last few verses weren’t based on the standard of man. But the Greek word for man doesn’t always refer specifically to a male human being. Sometimes it refers more generally to the human race. And this is the meaning that we see whenever Paul used this phrase in another place. Look at Galatians 1:11: “For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin.” The Greek phrase translated “of human origin” literally means “according to man.” It’s the same one that we have in our passage. And in this verse Paul was saying that the gospel he preached did not come from a human being.

We see this phrase used again in Galatians 3. Look at verse 15: “Brothers and sisters, I’m using a human illustration. No one sets aside or makes additions to a validated human will.” The Greek phrase translated “using a human illustration” literally means “speaking according to man.” In the previous verses he was talking about how we’re justified or declared righteous. It happens by faith and not by works. And it was a fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham in the Old Testament. Then in this verse Paul spoke according to man, and the idea is communicated very well in the Christian Standard Bible. He was talking about a human will to illustrate the fact that God keeps his promises.

So in 1 Corinthians 9:8 Paul was saying something similar in the first question here. When he talked about speaking according to man, he was referring back to his three everyday illustrations in the previous verse. Those were human illustrations, just like the human illustration that he used in Galatians 3:15. And there was nothing wrong with Paul using those illustrations. But Paul knew that his position was weak if he was relying only on those human illustrations. He didn’t want to speak just from a human perspective. I like how the New American Standard Bible adds the word “just” in this question. Now this word is in italics, which shows that it doesn’t come directly from the Greek text. But it’s implied by the context. It’s clear that Paul did speak from a human perspective in verse 7, but that wasn’t the only perspective he was giving.

And that leads us to the second rhetorical question in verse 8. Paul asked, “Doesn’t the law also say the same thing?” Now once again the Christian Standard Bible is missing a word here, and so is the English Standard Version. But we can find it in the Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible. It’s the word “or” at the beginning of the question. This is the same word that we saw at the beginning of the question in verse 6. Then we also saw this word at the beginning of the third question in verse 7. Now we’re seeing it again at the beginning of another question here in verse 8. And it has the same function in all three places. Paul was just giving an alternative perspective in all three places. He talked about speaking from a human perspective in the first question. But in the second question he was speaking from a different perspective.

And notice that he used the word “also” here. This word shows that Paul wasn’t denying in the first question that he spoke from a human perspective at all. His point was simply that he didn’t speak only from a human perspective. This word shows very clearly that it’s appropriate to add the word “just” in the first question. But this view is also confirmed by the phrase “the same thing” at the end of the second question. Now the Greek word here is actually the same one that we saw in the first question. It’s a neuter plural word that literally means “these things.” That’s what we see in the Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible. But once again Paul was referring back to his right to receive financial support, just like he was doing in the first question. So it’s appropriate for the Christian Standard Bible and the English Standard Version to use the word “same” here. It accurately conveys the strong connection between these two questions.

So in the second question Paul was giving us a different perspective on the same topic. He asked, “Doesn’t the law also say the same thing?” And I think the obvious answer to this question is “yes.” The law does give the same perspective. But what did Paul mean when he used the word “law”? Let’s talk more about this word. It’s almost 200 times in the New Testament, and so it’s a very common word. In fact, Paul himself used it over 100 times in his letters. But he used it only nine times in 1 Corinthians, and this is the first occurrence. Now this word can refer specifically to an individual rule, but it can also refer more generally to a set of rules. And it can be used to refer to any kind of rule from anyone in authority. So it’s a pretty flexible word.

But in the New Testament this word usually refers to God’s law. And Scripture is full of rules that God has given to people. There are lots of them in the Old Testament, but we can also find plenty of them in the New Testament as well. And theologians have put these rules into different categories. But Scripture itself gives us two basic categories that we should start with. Let me show them to you. Turn to Hebrews 10, and let’s look at the first category. Follow along as I read verse 28: “Anyone who disregarded the law of Moses died without mercy, based on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” So this first category of rules is called the law of Moses. And this verse says that those who disregarded this law were put to death. So it was very important for the people to keep these rules!

And we have a clear example in Luke 2 of people keeping this law. In the beginning of this chapter we have a famous story about the birth of Jesus. But look at what happened afterwards in verses 21–24: “When the eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus—the name given by the angel before he was conceived. And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were finished, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord) and to offer a sacrifice (according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons).” So verse 22 makes a reference to the law of Moses, and we can see that Mary and Joseph obeyed the rules in the law of Moses about purification after a baby was born.

Now verse 23 uses the word “law” by itself, but it’s clearly another reference to the law of Moses. And we can see that Mary and Joseph obeyed additional rules in the law of Moses. They dedicated Jesus to the Lord since he was Mary’s firstborn, and they offered a sacrifice when they did that. Luke even quoted

these rules so that we can see exactly what they were. And the Christian Standard Bible gives us a helpful footnote after each quote here. The first one comes from Exodus 13:2 and also verse 12 in that chapter. The second quote comes from Leviticus 5:11 and also 12:8. So we can see very clearly that the law of Moses was recorded in the Old Testament and more specifically the beginning of the Old Testament. That shouldn't surprise us, because Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, and he lived during the events of all five books except the first one.

Now we need to make sure that we don't misunderstand the phrase "law of Moses." This doesn't mean that Moses was the one who came up with these rules. This law came from God, but he gave it to the Israelites through Moses. Now God actually gave the Ten Commandments directly to the people on Mount Sinai. But they were terribly frightened by that experience, so they asked if God could give the rest of the laws through Moses. And God obliged them. So in the Old Testament God gave most of his laws for the Israelites through Moses. And that's why this set of rules is called "the law of Moses." But there's another set of rules mentioned in the New Testament. Look at Galatians 6:1-2: "Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted. Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

So in verse 2 Paul did not refer to the law of Moses but to the law of Christ. This phrase is a reference to the rules that Jesus gave to his disciples. And by extension it includes the rules given by the apostles of Jesus. After all, they were his official representatives and carried his authority. Now the relationship between the law of Moses and the law of Christ is tricky. Paul mentioned the law of Christ later in 1 Corinthians 9, and so we'll return this issue in a few months. But for now I just want you to understand that when the New Testament uses the word "law" by itself, it's usually referring to either the law of Moses or the law of Christ.

So which law was Paul referring to in 1 Corinthians 9:8? Well, thankfully this is a very easy question to answer. All we need to do is keep reading! Look at what Paul wrote in the first part of verse 9: "For it is written in the law of Moses, Do not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain." Notice that Paul started this verse with the word "for." This word introduces an explanation of the previous verse. It shows what Paul was talking about when he used the word "law" at the end of verse 8. He was talking about the law of Moses. But Paul didn't just refer to the law of Moses. He also gave us a quote from it. And he introduced this quote with the phrase "it is written."

Now the phrase "it is written" comes from just one word in the original Greek. And we've actually seen this word five times earlier in 1 Corinthians. All of them are in the first four chapters, and in most of those cases this word introduces a quote from the Old Testament, just like we have here. So let's talk about this Greek word in more detail. It's a verb in the passive voice and the perfect tense. The passive voice just indicates that the subject of the verb does not perform the action. Instead the subject receives the action of the verb. Here's a simple example in English: Billy was hit by the ball. Billy is the subject of the verb, but he didn't do the action. He didn't hit the ball; instead the ball hit him! He received the action of the verb.

But in our verse there's no Greek word that functions as the subject of the verb. The word "it" is just an interpretation based on the fact that the Greek verb has a third person singular suffix. This means that the implied subject could theoretically be a person or a thing since the verb is not marked for gender. But the Christian Standard Bible isn't the only translation that has the word "it" here. Every other major English translation that's relatively literal has the same word at this point. And I think the reason they all go in this direction is simply that things are written down, not people. The word "it" is really just pointing forward to the quote in the middle of the verse. This statement is what was previously written.

So we know what received the action of the verb, but we also know who did the writing. Paul said that this statement was written in the law of Moses. So we know that Moses was the one who wrote down this statement. And the Christian Standard Bible once again gives us a footnote to show us where we can find this statement. It's located in Deuteronomy 25:4. So Moses wrote down this statement, but as I said earlier, it didn't come ultimately from him. And this fact is true for every statement recorded in Scripture. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul said that "all Scripture is inspired by God." So God is the ultimate author of Scripture. He certainly used men to write down his words, and he even allowed them to use their own vocabularies and writing styles. But the words of Scripture ultimately came from him.

We have a very clear statement to this effect in Matthew chapter 1. In verse 21 we see that an angel told Joseph that his fiancée Mary would give birth to Jesus. But listen to what Matthew wrote in verses 22–23: "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated 'God is with us.'" So in verse 23 Matthew was giving us a quote from Isaiah 7:14. But notice how he introduced this quote. At the end of verse 22 he said that this statement "was spoken by the Lord through the prophet." In other words, Isaiah was simply the channel through whom the Lord spoke. God was communicating through him.

So we've talked about the fact that the Greek verb for written in 1 Corinthians 9:9 is in the passive voice. This means that the statement Paul quoted didn't do the writing but was written. And we've concluded that God spoke these words through Moses. In other words, this statement is completely trustworthy and carries the highest authority. But this verb isn't just in the passive voice; it's also in the perfect tense. In biblical Greek the perfect tense generally refers to a completed action with ongoing results. The idea here is that the quotation from Deuteronomy 25:4 was written down in the past, but it continued to have relevance in Paul's day. It still had validity and significance hundreds of years after it was written.

And Paul commented on this fact over in 2 Timothy 3 as well. He didn't just say in verse 16 that "all Scripture is inspired by God." He also said that it's "profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness." God's word helps us to know what we should believe and how we should live. It teaches and trains us to live righteously, but it also rebukes and corrects us when we sin. And the end result is found in verse 17. Paul said that Scripture is profitable in these ways "so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." In other words, the Bible enables to be spiritually mature, and it makes us capable to serve the Lord. It tells us everything we need to know so that we can please God. There's nothing else that's essential for the Christian life; Scripture is sufficient!

Now we don't have time today to talk about this quote from Deuteronomy 25:4, and so we'll return to it next week. But for now I want to challenge you to be in God's word regularly. It's not good enough just to be here at church on Sundays and hear the word preached. It's not even good enough to be in a small group like ours as well. Reading the Bible is a lot like eating food; we need it to survive! But we shouldn't be content just to read the Bible. We also need to study it carefully so that we can understand it accurately. It's good to read longer portions of God's word in one sitting so that you can get the big picture. But it's also important to slow down and chew on one or two verses at a time for a while. That's what we're doing in this class, and I encourage you to do that on your own as well.

And if you don't know how to study the Bible on your own, I want to encourage you to consider attending a new class that we're offering in our Bible institute. It's called "Bible Interpretation," and it's going to be meeting on Wednesdays at 6:00 pm for 10 weeks starting on March 20. Our focus in this class will be on learning the principles of how to interpret the Bible. We're going to be reading through a very helpful book called "Basic Bible Interpretation" by Roy Zuck. But whether you attend this class or not, I want to encourage you to dig into Scripture on a regular basis. Don't just read it for a few minutes at a time. Find some extended time to immerse yourself in God's Word and study it carefully. Then make sure that you apply it to your life and live in obedience to it. Let's close in prayer.