

# 1 CORINTHIANS 9:9B

March 10, 2024

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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 4–6 he asked three rhetorical questions that centered on his right to have financial support. In verse 4 he talked about his right to eat and drink. In verse 5 he talked about his right to have a believing wife who would travel with him. And in verse 6 he talked about his right to refrain from working. Now both Paul and Barnabas were single and chose to work with their hands to provide for themselves. But Paul's point here was that they had these rights, just like the other apostles.

Then in verse 7 Paul asked three more rhetorical questions, and in each one he gave an illustration to defend his right to receive support as an apostle. The first one was a soldier, the second one was a farmer, and the third one was a shepherd. The soldier got his expenses covered, the farmer got to eat some fruit from his vineyard, and the shepherd got to drink some of the milk that came from the flock. So this verse proves from everyday life that Paul had the right to receive financial support for his ministry as an apostle. But it's easy to see how some people at this point might have thought that Paul's argument was weak. That's why he asked another rhetorical question in verse 8: "Am I saying this from a human perspective?" And the obvious answer to this question is "no."

Now 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. This word 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: "Doesn't the law also say the same thing?" That word "also" does come directly from the Greek text, and it shows that Paul wasn't denying 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.

So in the second question Paul was giving us a different perspective on the same topic. And the obvious answer to this question is "yes." The law says the same thing as the human illustrations that Paul gave earlier. Now the Greek word for law can refer specifically to an individual rule or 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. They're called the law of Moses and the law of Christ. The law of Moses is recorded in the beginning of the Old Testament. And it includes the rules that God gave to the Israelites through Moses on Mount Sinai. But the law of Christ refers 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 addressed that issue later in chapter 9, and so we'll return to it fairly soon. But for now it's important 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.

And thankfully it's very easy to figure out which law Paul was referring to in verse 8. 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." So in this verse Paul made it clear that he was talking about the law of Moses. But he also gave us a quote from it, and he introduced this quote with the phrase "it is written." Now this phrase comes from just one word in the original Greek. 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. Now there's no Greek word here that functions as the subject of the verb. But every translation gives us the word "it," which is just pointing forward to the quote in the middle of the verse. This statement is what was previously written, and it was written by Moses.

But 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 like Moses 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. So this statement that Paul quoted is completely trustworthy and carries the highest authority. And it wasn't just relevant during Old Testament times. The Greek verb for written in 1 Corinthians 9:9 is in the perfect tense, which generally refers to a completed action with ongoing results. So this quote from the law of Moses 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.

So let's talk more about this quote from the law of Moses. We weren't able to dig into it last week, but now we're ready to jump in. So let's cover some new material and look at the rest of verse 9, starting with this quote. Paul said that "it is written in the law of Moses, Do not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain." Now thankfully the Christian Standard Bible gives us a footnote that tells us exactly where this statement is located in the law of Moses. It's found in Deuteronomy 25:4. Deuteronomy is the fifth of five books that Moses wrote. It records his words to the Israelites right before they entered the land of Canaan. He couldn't enter the land with them because of an earlier incident when he disobeyed the Lord.

But Moses was an old man by this point anyway, because the Israelites had been in the wilderness for the past 40 years. The people actually reached the land of Canaan after just a few years, but when they heard

a report from their scouts about how strong the Canaanites were, they refused to enter the land. So God said that none of them would get to enter the land except Joshua and Caleb. They were the only two scouts who tried to convince the people to enter the land. Everyone else ended up dying in the wilderness. But in the book of Deuteronomy the next generation of Israelites was just about ready to enter the land. However, Moses wanted to talk to them about God's law first. The word "Deuteronomy" means "second law," but this title is actually misleading, because the book doesn't actually contain a second law. Instead it just has an explanation of the law that was originally given on Sinai almost 40 years earlier. So Moses wasn't teaching a new law but reviewing the existing law.

Now this book can be divided into four sections. Each of the first three sections has a speech from Moses to the Israelites. Then the fourth section forms the conclusion to the book. It focuses on some final details surrounding the death of Moses. But the first three sections are the main focus in the book. In the first speech Moses was focused on remembering Israel's past. In the second speech he explained God's law to the Israelites in the present. And in the third speech he talked about how God would renew his covenant with the Israelites in the future. Now the first and second speeches are relatively short, but the second speech takes up most of the 34 chapters in this book. It starts in chapter 5 and goes all the way through chapter 28. So this section is the most emphatic one in the book, and it's where we find the statement that Paul quoted in 1 Corinthians 9:9.

Now this statement is found in the middle of a section on relationship laws. It starts in chapter 23 and verse 19 and goes through the end of chapter 25. At the end of chapter 23 Moses told the people that they were not allowed to charge interest to their fellow Israelites. In the beginning of chapter 24 Moses focused on the marriage relationship. In verses 1–4 he gave some rules about divorce and remarriage, and in verse 5 he said that a new husband was exempt from military service. Then in verses 10–15 Moses talked about how to treat a poor person. And in verses 17–22 he focused on how to treat the foreign national, the fatherless, and the widow.

Then in chapter 25 and verses 1–3 there's a focus on the administration of justice in the courtroom. And Moses warned that punishment was not to be excessive. If a guilty person deserved to be flogged, he was to be given no more than 40 lashes. Later on the Jews were afraid of exceeding this amount through miscounting, so they subtracted one to be safe. Paul referred to this practice in 2 Corinthians 11:24, where he said that he received 39 lashes from the Jews on five different occasions. So it's on this note that Moses wrote Deuteronomy 25:4: "Do not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain." This verse seems to come out of nowhere, but it does flow naturally from verses 1–3. It would have been tempting for the Israelites to mistreat their animals by flogging them excessively. But Moses said that the people needed to be kind to their animals.

So Paul quoted this verse in 1 Corinthians 9:9, and he gave a pretty literal translation from the original Hebrew. We can see that especially with the Greek word for muzzle. This word is used only here in the New Testament, and it sounds like a command in the Christian Standard Bible. But this word is actually just a regular verb in the future tense. That's why the word "shall" is used in the English Standard Version, the Legacy Standard Bible, and the New American Standard Bible. We don't really use this word very

much anymore, but it's basically equivalent to the word "will." That's the word we use to form the future tense in English. Now we normally use the future tense to talk about what we're going to do in the future. But sometimes we use this tense to give an emphatic command. For example, I might say to one of my kids, "You will clean up your room today." I'm not making a prediction with that statement; I'm telling my child what to do!

And that's what Moses was doing here in this verse that Paul was quoting. He was giving a command to the Israelites not to muzzle an ox. A muzzle is basically a device that we put over the mouth of an animal to keep it from opening its mouth. Muzzles have been around for a long time. I found a picture of a bronze muzzle in a museum that was from the third century B.C. Now a muzzle would protect people from being bitten by an animal, and that's normally how we use muzzles today. For example, many dogs don't like being groomed, and so they try to bite the person who's grooming them. So a muzzle would help to prevent that from happening.

But a muzzle also prevents the animal from eating, and that's clearly the focus in our passage. Moses commanded the Israelites not to muzzle an ox while it treads out grain. Now domesticated oxen don't usually bite unless they feel threatened. So the point of the muzzle here would be to keep the ox from eating as it worked near food. Now the Greek word for ox is used only eight times in the New Testament. It's used three times in Paul's letters, and the other five occurrences are found in the Gospels. Three of them are in Luke, and the other two are in John. In John 2:14–15 Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple complex. But he also drove out people who were selling oxen, sheep, and doves. He didn't want the people turning his Father's house into a marketplace.

But in Luke's Gospel Jesus spoke more positively about oxen. In Luke 13:15 he talked about how people would untie their ox and lead it to water on the Sabbath. In Luke 14:5 he said that people would pull their ox out of a well on the Sabbath if it fell in. So in both of these verses Jesus showed that people would be kind to their ox and do some work to help it, even on the Sabbath day. And there was nothing wrong with doing that! God was fine with people doing that sort of basic work on the Sabbath. Now Paul also spoke about oxen in a positive way. He used the Greek word for ox twice here in 1 Corinthians 9:9. But he also used it in 1 Timothy 5:18, where he also gave a quote from Deuteronomy 25:4. We'll take a closer look at that verse in the coming weeks. But my point for now is that Paul spoke positively about oxen in both of these passages. In both places he quoted the law that the Israelites were not to muzzle an ox while it treads out grain.

Now the phrase "treads out grain" comes from one Greek word. It's used only three times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote all three of them. He used it again in the next verse, and he also used it in 1 Timothy 5:18. That's the verse I just mentioned where Paul also gave a quote from Deuteronomy 25:4. Now this Greek word is a verb that means "to thresh." In fact, the word "threshing" is used here in the Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible. And this verb is obviously describing an action that was done by the ox. During ancient times an ox was used to pull a huge stone over grain that was collected and put on a threshing floor. And this stone would separate the kernels of grain from the stalks that they were attached to. Then the grain could be used to bake bread.

So now we can understand why people would have muzzled an ox in this situation. The ox was right there with the grain! And people would not have wanted the ox to eat a bunch of their grain while it was working. After all, the people wanted that grain for themselves! And even if they didn't eat it, they could still sell it to make money. So there would have been a strong temptation to muzzle the ox. But Moses told the Israelites not to stop the ox from eating as it worked. After all, oxen need to eat just like people do. And if an ox gets hungry while it's working, why not let it eat some of the grain? That will keep the ox happy and help it to continue working effectively. So Moses was basically telling the Israelites to treat their oxen with kindness.

But why did Paul quote this statement here in 1 Corinthians 9:9? Paul hasn't been talking about oxen in this passage or even animals in general. Instead he's been talking about his right to receive financial support. So Paul seemed to be using this statement to support this right that he had. And we can confirm this hypothesis by looking at what he wrote next. Look at what Paul said at the end of verse 9: "Is God really concerned about oxen?" Here is yet another rhetorical question. It's number thirteen so far in this chapter. And remember that a rhetorical question is one that has an obvious answer. So Paul wasn't asking all these questions because he was looking for the answers. He was asking them because he wanted his readers to stop and think more deeply about what he was talking about.

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, "God is not concerned about oxen, is He?" Now that phrase "is He" 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 simply saying here that God is not concerned about oxen.

Now even the New American Standard Bible is not super literal here. Let me give you an even more literal translation of this question: "Is it not a concern to God of oxen?" But that wording is not very smooth English. So instead of talking about something being a concern to God, most translations talk about God being concerned about something. And instead of saying "of oxen," it's smoother to say "about oxen." So the New American Standard Bible does a pretty good job here of communicating the meaning of Paul's question in clear English. Now the Greek word for concerned is used only 10 times in the New Testament. Paul wrote two of them, and they're both found in this letter. We already saw the first one in chapter 7 and verse 21. Look at what Paul wrote in that verse: "Were you called while a slave? Don't let it concern you. But if you can become free, by all means take the opportunity."

So in this verse Paul gave a command to people who were already slaves when they got saved. He told them not to be concerned about it. In other words, it didn't matter whether they were slaves or not. God was not displeased with them just because they were slaves. Now this doesn't mean that God didn't allow a slave to become free from slavery. After all, Paul told Christian slaves here to become free if they had the opportunity. So it's better to be free than to be a slave. But Paul's point here was that it wasn't essential for a slave to get out of that condition. People can live in full obedience to the Lord even if they're slaves.

Now we also see the Greek word for concerned in John 10. Look at what Jesus said in verses 11–13: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and doesn’t own the sheep, leaves them and runs away when he sees a wolf coming. The wolf then snatches and scatters them. This happens because he is a hired man and doesn’t care about the sheep.” The word “care” at the end of verse 13 comes from the same Greek word that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 9:9. Jesus called himself the good shepherd who died to save his spiritual sheep. And he compared himself to someone who is hired to watch physical sheep but doesn’t care about them. So the point here is that Jesus is concerned about us. He cares so much for us that he died for us!

And we see a similar truth in 1 Peter 5. Look at what Peter wrote in verses 6–7: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.” The Greek word for cares at the end of verse 7 is the same word that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 9:9. So God the Father cares for us just like God the Son does. And whenever we experience things that concern us, we can cast those concerns on God. He’s happy to carry those burdens for us. There’s nothing too difficult for God to handle! We can take everything to him in prayer and trust him to do what’s best for us in every situation.

But in 1 Corinthians 9:9 Paul seemed to be saying that God is not concerned about oxen. The Greek word for oxen is the same one that we saw earlier in the verse. It’s just plural now instead of singular. So why would Paul say that God is not concerned about oxen? After all, he just quoted a command from the law of Moses that was talking about showing kindness to oxen. And this isn’t the only place in Scripture where we see God’s care for animals. Psalm 147:9 says that God “provides the animals with their food, and the young ravens what they cry for.” In Matthew 6:26 Jesus said, “Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them.” In Luke 12:6 Jesus said, “Aren’t five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight.”

So it’s obvious that God cares about the animals he created. And we should care about the animals as well. That’s why Moses commanded the Israelites not to muzzle an ox while it treads out grain. And righteous people would have joyfully obeyed this command. Listen to what Solomon said in Proverbs 12:10: “The righteous cares about his animal’s health, but even the merciful acts of the wicked are cruel.” So Paul’s rhetorical question at the end of 1 Corinthians 9:9 is rather confusing. Why would he imply that God is not concerned about oxen? Now many Bible scholars think that Paul was just talking about the interpretation of Deuteronomy 25:4. So Paul wasn’t saying that God didn’t care about animals but that this particular command didn’t have anything to do with animals. In other words, these Bible scholars conclude that Paul was interpreting this verse allegorically or figuratively.

But that approach is going too far. It would be better to say that Paul was just arguing from the lesser to the greater here. He was saying that God doesn’t just care about oxen but that he cares for people as well. In fact, I think it’s safe to say that he cares more about us than he does about oxen. In Matthew 6:26 after Jesus said that God feeds the birds, he asked this rhetorical question: “Aren’t you worth more than they?” And the obvious answer is “yes”! So I like what the Legacy Standard Bible does at the end of 1 Corinthians 9:9. It adds the word “merely” to this question. This word is in italics, which means that it doesn’t

come directly from the Greek text. But it's strongly implied by the context. So Paul wasn't denying that God cared about oxen. He was saying that God cares even more for people.

And I think we can see this fact even back in Deuteronomy. We saw that the command in chapter 25 and verse 4 was in a section of laws about human relationships. Most of the commands that were leading up to this one had to do with how people treated others, especially those who were needy. So Moses was clearly talking about how to treat oxen in that verse. But he was implying that we should treat other people even better. If we should show some kindness to our animals, then we should certainly be kind to our fellow human beings as well. Now we'll look at Paul's specific application of this verse in the coming weeks. But for now let's make sure that we're treating the people around us with kindness and generosity. Let's close in prayer and ask for God's help to do that.