

PREFACE

Before we dig into the text for this session, I'd like to spend a few moments looking at this issue of what Paul, as an apostle, was entitled to but often denied himself. There are some who have said that Paul's criterion for accepting help from one church but not from another was the financial health of the individual church—that is, whether or not the church could afford it. But that theory does not track with the apostle's missionary history, nor does it track with the teachings of Jesus.

Paul did both: he accepted help from some, but rejected help (or did not request it) from others. In at least one instance he at first rejected it, but was ultimately "prevailed" upon and relented. (Turn to Acts 16) Shortly after arriving in the Macedonian town of Philippi, Paul and his compatriots visit a place of prayer alongside a river on the Sabbath.

Read Acts 16:14-15.

prevailed = *parabiasato* = from <G3844> (para) and the middle of <G971> (biazo); **to force contrary to (nature), i.e. compel (by entreaty)** :- constrain; **to force against**. Same word used by the two disciples to persuade Jesus to remain with them for a meal on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:29).

In v12b Paul gives us and the Corinthians a clue as to his purposeful decision to support himself while in Corinth:

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**. (emphasis added)

This can be taken to mean (as Fee) that he was emphasizing the "free gift" of salvation in Christ by his example of offering (preaching) the gospel freely—i.e., without pay or even acceptance of gratuity. This seems a valid interpretation—especially to the Corinthians—but we are again left asking the question, *Why here, but not elsewhere? This reason would apply equally to the Macedonians; why did he then so gratefully accept their offering—especially considering their plight?*

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

The churches in Macedonia were poor and the Corinthians, as best as we can determine, were well-off. Yet Paul gratefully accepted funds from the former and rejected funds from the latter. So we need some explanation beyond the ones we've heard so far.

I believe we can find an answer—or at least a clue—to this in the extraordinary scene of God’s judgment in the fateful story of Ananias and Sapphira, a couple in the early church in Jerusalem. In Acts 4 we read of a pattern of sharing that was established in that Christian community.

Read Acts 4:32-35.

Note that “those who believed were of one heart and soul,” and “not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own,” and “abundant grace was upon them all.” Here is a picture of extravagant, voluntary generosity from the heart. This is followed by an example of such generosity and sharing.

Read Acts 4:36-37.

But when we turn the page to Chapter Five we read a cautionary tale of giving that was *not* from the heart.

Read Acts 5:1-6.

And God was not finished. The wife received the same terrible judgment.

Read Acts 5:7-11.

Scattered throughout the entirety of Scripture is evidence that the Lord God hates duplicity and insincerity. In Psalm 55 David describes the treacherous, and calls down the Lord’s judgment on them.

He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him;
He has violated his covenant.
His speech was smother than butter,
But his heart was war;
His words were softer than oil,
Yet they were drawn swords.
Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you;
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.
But You, O God, will bring them down to the pit of destruction;
Men of bloodshed and deceit will not live out half their days.
But I will trust in You. (Psalm 55:20-23)

I believe at least a factor in Paul’s decision not to accept help from the Corinthians was that he knew that that help would not be sincere—it would not have been from the heart—and thus not God-honoring. He knew them, and from his letters we have a pretty good picture of their thinking and behavior. Even if this *was* behind Paul’s decision, we cannot of course be sure of his *motive*. Was he protecting the Corinthians from God’s strict judgment? Was he keeping them from this sin? Or was it his pique at their attitude? We cannot say with certainty.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:3-7.

v3

My defense to those who examine me is this:

The NIVs and ESV make v3 a summation statement for vv1-2: “This [i.e., what I just said] is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me.” But both Garland and Fee convincingly argue that the position of *haute* (“this”) at the end of the clause in the Greek demands that v3 refers to what follows, rather than the preceding—as in the NASB and KJVs. Hence instead of a period, a colon, pointing forward. Paul is defending himself against those who are “sit[ting] in judgment” on him (NIVs).

examine, sit in judgment = *anakrino* = from <G303> (ana) and <G2919> (krino); properly to **scrutinize**, i.e. (by implication) **investigate, interrogate, determine** :- ask, question, discern, examine, **judge**, search; a legal term for the investigation or inquiry made before a decision was reached in a case (MacArthur).

w4-5

Now Paul begins his defense, the purpose of which is to force the Corinthians to recognize that, as an apostle, he has certain rights—and specifically his right to their support.

Do we not have a right to eat and drink?

If Paul had not included “drink” here, we could assume that he was hearkening back to Chapter 8, and that situation about eating in a pagan temple. But by including “drink” he seems to be speaking of his right, as an apostle, to be provisioned by those to whom he ministers—on which he will expand in vv8-11.

Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

A “believing wife,” as all of our versions translate this, means literally, “a sister as a wife”—that is, a sister in the Lord who is also a wife. Here again he brings this up in the context of apostolic right to support.

Sidebar: Rights are funny things. We know coming into this passage that Paul is doing more than demand his rights from unwilling Corinthians. We know going in that, for example, Paul does *not* have a wife with him—indeed, has no wife at all. So what is his point? Where he is eventually going with this is his “right” *not* to avail himself of his apostolic rights!

Just as with the issue of food and drink in v4, this is probably an argument for an apostle (especially one on the road) to have his believing wife supported with him. They comprise a team, so she should be supported along with him.

Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?

Sidebar: Although the original NIV, in removing the double negative in the original—“Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?”—essentially gets to the same point (but over-stated), it is a poor *translation* because it is not what Paul said.

Though awkwardly stated, Paul is continuing his defense for his rights as an apostle. At first glance it seems a little odd that Paul would mention Barnabas instead of Silas, since it was the latter who was with him during the second missionary journey when he visited Corinth (Barnabas and Paul parted company just before the second trip over the John Mark issue).

The most probable explanation would be that the Corinthians were familiar with the reputation of Barnabas as someone, like Paul, who worked at a trade while traveling as a missionary for the gospel. “In the first great mission tour, Barnabas and Paul received no help from the church in Antioch, but were left to work their way along at their own charges. It was not till the Philippian Church took hold that Paul had financial aid (Philippians 4:15)” (A. T. Robertson).

The apostle wrote a more detailed account of his working in his second letter to the Thessalonians—off-hours work with which he supported himself, apparently for a different reason than in Corinth (their idleness).

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9.

Paul is saying here that by working to support himself, for reasons of his own choosing, he is *not* forfeiting his rights as an apostle.

As the paragraph and passage continue, Paul will cite practical examples to supplement his defense arguments.