

## PREFACE

In vv3-6 Paul established his right, as an apostle, to be supported by those to whom he ministered. Note: “Support” does not mean paid a wage, a daily salary, or the right to hand the church a bill for his services, but simply to be fed and perhaps housed while serving in their midst. He now illustrates what he has been saying in vv3-6 with three examples from real life—each of which expects a negative response.

## Read 1 Corinthians 9:7.

v7

*Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense?*

At first glance we might think Paul refers here to a soldier’s salary, but in this context the word translated “expense” in all our translations refers not to wages but rations.

**opsonion** = neuter of a presumed derivative of the same as <G3795> (opsarion);  
**rations for a soldier**, i.e. (by extension) his stipend or pay :- wages.

A close relative of this word tells the story:

**opsarion** = neuter of a presumed derivative of the base of <G3702> (optos); **a relish to other food (as if cooked sauce), i.e. (special) fish (presumably salted and dried as a condiment)** :- fish.

Elsewhere in the NT *opsonion* can refer to wages, but here, in this context it refers to basic room and board due a soldier of the state. In fact it was not at all common for Roman soldiers to receive any wage at all; their pay was traditionally the “spoils of war.”

*Will Durant* (The Story of Civilization): Food in camp was simple: bread or porridge, some vegetables, sour wine, rarely flesh; the Roman army conquered the world on a vegetarian diet; Caesar’s troops complained when corn ran out and they had to eat meat. The soldier received no pay till 405 B.C., and little thereafter; but he was allowed to share, according to his rank, in the booty of the defeated—bullion and currency, lands and men and movable goods.

This first illustration is simply a restating of v4: “Do we not have a right to eat and drink?” And Garland points out that all three of “these analogies refer only to maintenance for basic subsistence, and questions about wages for the work are far from Paul’s mind (Heidland).”

*Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it?*

**Read Proverbs 27:18.**

In his second letter to Timothy, and probably his last letter before his death, Paul writes to his son in the faith, “The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.” (2 Timothy 2:6)

*Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?*

I am amused by how all of our common versions—except for the original KJV—are too chicken to translate this literally: NKJV, NIV: *drink* the milk; ESV: *getting some of* the milk; NASB: *use* the milk.

YLT: ...or who doth feed a flock, and of the milk of the flock doth not eat?

This may indicate that to the ancients milk was considered a food for nourishment, and not a drink; hence it is to be “eaten.”

*M. R. Vincent:* Bengel remarks: “The minister of the gospel is beautifully compared with the soldier, vine-dresser, [and] shepherd.” He goes forth to contend with the world, to plant churches, and to exercise pastoral care over them.

**Read 1 Corinthians 9:8-10.**

v8

*I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?*

In moving from v7 to v8 the apostle Paul gives us a valuable lesson. He can only go so long in his arguments and counsel—in this case, three brief sentences—before citing Scripture. For Christians in the first century and today, our final authority is God: His written word and His Spirit active in each life. Citing that which is common and natural, as he did in v7, goes only so far; it may be evidence, but it is not at all authority. Only the sovereign God has that.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13.**

v9

*For it is written in the Law of Moses, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He?*

Many have taken issue with Paul’s use of Deuteronomy 25:4, claiming that the second part of v9, the question, “God is not concerned about oxen, is He?”, and v10 show a disregard for what God’s word says elsewhere.

**Read Luke 12:6.**

But the next verse offers us a clue as to how to interpret what Paul is saying in our text.

### Read Luke 12:7.

The ultimate audience for the word of God—the ultimate receivers of its truth—is the congregation of those who claim Christ Jesus as Lord. Does this mean that God has no regard at all for animals? No, His word says different. But just as He made man the dominant species on earth, God designated man as the ultimate recipient of His word. We see the same combination that we see in Luke 12 in the source of Paul’s quote from “the Law of Moses.” [Turn to Deuteronomy 25](#). Verse 4 is the verse Paul quotes to the Corinthians: “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” But look at the passage immediately before v4.

### Read Deuteronomy 25:1-3.

Now look at what immediately follows.

### Read Deuteronomy 25:5-6.

This illustrates that the ultimate audience for this is *people*. All these lessons are for us. Oxen cannot read Scripture. There is no version of God’s word in “oxen”.

v10

*Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written...*

In a sense, Paul is doing with the OT what we do very often with the OT and NT—and primarily his letters. For example, is it *really* important to our walk with Christ for us to know and understand the culture of first-century Corinth? Not really; it may be interesting for some of us, but two thousand years later our culture and perspective—even with its similarities—is mostly different from theirs. But we take that information and translate it into our modern culture: instead of banqueting in a pagan temple, perhaps dining with Muslims in a mosque, or supping with members of the *Freedom from Religion* crowd.

Paul does not suggest that Yahweh is an animal hater simply because he points out that the ultimate audience for such truth is the redeemed in Christ.

*because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.*

Thus not just the oxen that pull the plow or thresh out the grain, but the human beings who have a hand in tending and processing the crop are due their share. In the Greek the word “hope” is emphasized, and carries the same meaning as when it is applied to the hope of the believer for his eternal salvation and glory.

**hope** = *elpis* = from a primary *elpo* (to **anticipate**, usually with pleasure);  
**expectation** (abstract or concrete) or **confidence** :- **faith**, hope.

This expectation was played out dramatically in the story of David and his men in their work performed for Nabal's shepherds, which we find in 1 Samuel 25. David had earlier sent a small company of men to protect the flocks of Nabal in Carmel. Later one of Nabal's men informs his wife Abigail of all David's men did for them.

But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, ... "The men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as we went about with them, while we were in the fields. They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them tending the sheep. (1 Samuel 25:14-16)

In keeping with the Law and middle-eastern custom, during the time of shearing—which would have been a festive occasion—David sends a few men to politely and graciously request "Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David" (1 Samuel 25:8b).

We are familiar with the story. The ungrateful Nabal not only refuses them, he does not even offer the men the basics of bread and water for their journey. And only through the wise intervention of his wife Abigail is Nabal spared massacre by David and his full company.

David and his men had a "hope"—a confident expectation—of a share in the bounty from the flock they had protected. In v10 Paul restates this for the benefit of the Corinthians: those who plow the field, those who have a hand in the sowing, nurturing, and harvesting of the crop have, and by all rights *should* have, a confident hope that they will have a share of the crop.

In v11 Paul will move from the general to the specific to declare that, as an apostle of Christ, "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?" This is where we will begin in our next session.