

**PREFACE**

It is possible that some of us have forgotten that the apostle Paul is still addressing the topic he began at the beginning of Chapter Eight: “Now concerning things sacrificed to idols...”, followed immediately, in the second sentence, by a comparison of “knowledge,” which “makes arrogant,” to “love,” which “edifies.”

Some may think that by our current passage near the end of Chapter Nine Paul has strayed off-topic; perhaps some of the Corinthians, reading this letter (in their knowledgeable arrogance), imagined the same thing. What does all this about muzzling the ox, a plowman’s and thresher’s hope in sharing the crop, the rights of apostles to be supported—what does all this have to do with eating food sacrificed to idols? But Paul has *not* lost his train of thought; he is still headed in the same direction. He is still laying the groundwork for his dramatic conclusion at the end of Chapter Ten and the first verse of Chapter Eleven.

All of this is centered on how he began this treatise: the excellency, the supremacy of Christian love. Follow with me the tapestry he is weaving:

- 8:13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. (*a sacrificial concern for others*)
- 9:12 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. (*enduring all things for the benefit of others*)
- 10:31-33 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. (*glorifying God by not seeking one’s own advantage, but the salvation of many*)
- 11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.. (*imitating Christ in all of this*)

If we had to summarize all this in one word, that word would have to be “love”—which is how he began this at the opening of Chapter Eight. So now let us return to this artfully crafted tapestry, following the apostle’s line of thought.

**Read 1 Corinthians 9:11-14.**

### v13

*Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?*

Thus far the arguments and evidence put forth by Paul for the right to support have been temporal analogies: soldier, vinedresser, shepherd, plowman, thresher, sower, reaper—even the one from Scripture, the threshing ox. Now in v13 he offers an analogy closer to home.

There is no point in arguing whether this illustration refers to pagan or Jewish cultic rites, for the practice was the same in both: those serving in the temple ate from the temple offerings. There are also two interpretations of the verse's two parts.

- The first interpretation concludes that the second part simply “repeats the first half in a more definite form” (R-P).
- The second interpretation makes the second half a different category of temple workers, which is the interpretation that makes more sense to me.

It was common practice, both in pagan cultic rites and in Israel, that those who served in the temple (“performed sacred services”) would be sustained by the food offerings brought by the penitents. In Israel these were subdivided: the common **Levites**—anyone from the tribe of Levi, third son of Jacob (Israel)—performed the more menial and common work around the temple, in service to the **priests**—Levites as well, but who could trace their lineage back directly to Aaron—who alone could serve at the altars. None of the Levites were granted land in Canaan (“no inheritance”); their “portion” would be from the tithes and offerings from the temple. And just as their duties were apportioned differently, so too was their sustenance. The Levites were supported by the tithes and offerings brought to the temple by the sons of Israel.

### Read Numbers 18:29-31.

Note that the Levites received the tithes of Israel, and from this *they* tithed to Aaron the priest.

### Read Numbers 18:28.

It was the priestly class, however, that got the best of the food.

### Read Numbers 18:8-14.

Then Paul applies this same rule from the Levites and priests to those who “proclaim the gospel.”

*(v13b repeated) Do you not know that...those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?*

Before we leave v13 I want to point out how the apostle, in its last thought, is setting up something he will say later. What he is setting up is an “if this, then that” comparison—or, “if this is true, then the reverse is also true.” In the latter part of Chapter Ten, when Paul is approaching the climax of this treatise on eating food sacrificed to idols, he will reference what he says here.

In v13 he establishes that those who “attend regularly” (or sit constantly beside) the altar—that is, the ministrants in the temple, and specifically the priests—have their share *from* the altar. That is, *the ones associated with the altar, eat from the altar*. Now look at v18 in Chapter Ten, where he turns this around: “if this is true, then the reverse is also true.”

### Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-18.

Here the logic of Chapter Nine is reversed; *the ones who eat from the altar are associated with the altar*. This is a sobering thought that we will develop further when we get to Chapter Ten.

v14

*So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.*

Since he cites something Jesus said, we should go look at what Jesus said. Paul probably refers to part of the Lord’s instructions as he was sending out the disciples in Luke 10.

### Read Luke 10:5-7.

In the gospel context, what Jesus says is not a “command,” but, as Fee points out, a proverb. And even though most of our versions (other than the NASB) translate the word in 1 Corinthians 9:14 “commanded,” it doesn’t have to be.

**commanded, direct(ed)**<sup>ylt, nasb</sup> = *diatasso* = from <G1223> (dia) and <G5021> (tasso); **to arrange thoroughly**, i.e. (special) **institute, prescribe**, etc. :- **appoint**, command, give, **(set in) order**, ordain. I interpret this word to mean, in this or a similar context, less a strict “you will do it this way (command),” than “I have determined that this is the best and most orderly way to conduct oneself.”

This is an important point because if the word means a literal, strict *command* from the Lord Jesus, then the apostle Paul is failing to obey his Lord by not accepting support from the Corinth church.

Or it could be, as Fee points out,

As “command” the word of Jesus referred to here does not have to do with *his* (Paul’s) action but *theirs* [the Corinthians]. The command is not given *to* the missionaries, but *for* their benefit.

MacArthur concurs:

The Lord commands his people to offer support to those who minister to them, but He does not command those who minister to accept the support. Paul did not. He had the right, as much as any and more than most. *But for the gospel’s sake, for the brethren’s sake and for love’s sake*, he gladly limited his liberty. He willingly waived his right. (emphasis added)

We should not miss, or misinterpret, the overarching point of this paragraph—indeed the whole chapter thus far. Paul has used up a lot of ink in this chapter making the case for someone in his position to receive either a salary or sustenance as support. Those reading this without benefit of the eyes and ears of the Holy Spirit would discover here authority, even license, to demand recompense for their “ministry.”

But that is not what is going on here. Again, go back to where he began at the top of Chapter Eight: “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.” Later, in Chapter Thirteen, he will describe this kind of *agape* love.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.**

Here is something the Corinthians—and we—desperately need to hear and apprehend. The highest and best form of love is not gush and mush, or sloppy sentimentalism—nor is it blind, uncritical “tolerance” (v6, “does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth”). It is not taking, but *giving*. It is not seeking what is best and most convenient for oneself, but that which is best for *others*. It is not demanding one’s rights, but sacrificially setting aside one’s rights for the benefit of others.

This is what the apostle is preaching in Chapter Nine—indeed, throughout much of this entire letter. *Here is a listing of all my rights as an apostle of Jesus Christ and the gospel*, he is saying, *and here is why I am relinquishing them: because I love Jesus Christ more than my rights; I love His gospel more than my own comfort; and I love you, Corinthians, more than myself.*

Here, in a nutshell, is the Christian life personified.