



The *San Jose Mercury* news reported last Friday that passengers on Thursday did a double-take on Southwest flight 896 from Sacramento to Burbank. To their surprise Governor Jerry Brown was sitting among them in coach class for his first official road trip to LA. Gov. Brown is very much in budget-cutting mode. Not only does he live in an apartment rather than the Governor's mansion, he didn't want to pay the \$16 extra for Southwest's "business select" seating. He flew with no press aides, no entourage, no security—not even his wife!

Of course he's doing this to send a message. Everyone knows he has the right to live in the Governor's mansion, he has the right to fly not just first class but on his own jet, and he certainly has the right to bring his staff and his wife with him, but he's chosen not to exercise those rights. Whatever you think about his politics, that's not such a bad message to send.

In fact, in that regard Jerry Brown looks very much like the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians Paul has been writing to believers in Corinth about this issue of our personal rights. In chapter 8 he told believers who had the right to exercise their personal freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols, they should be willing to forego those rights for the spiritual welfare of their fellow believers. Even though they had the right to do it, if it caused their fellow believer to stumble in their faith and fall back into a life of sin, they should refrain.

In chapter 9 Paul becomes an example of the very thing he's been talking about. He didn't have the mentality as a leader, "Do what I say, not what I do." He practiced what he preached. A leader's authority doesn't just come from what he preaches but from his own obedience. In this case, Paul wants them to know there are certain times when it's right **not** to act on your rights. To make his point, he'll describe some of the rights he has as an apostle, but then he'll turn around and say he doesn't act on those rights for the sake of the gospel.

Paul is an example to us of someone willing to give up their rights because there is something bigger than our rights at stake. I wonder what rights we might need to forego for the larger cause of the gospel or for the welfare of our fellow believers? What freedoms and privileges might I lay aside?

What makes this very interesting is Paul was being criticized for not using those rights. His critics in Corinth were saying, "If you were a real apostle, you'd act like it. You'd take advantage of all the privileges an apostle should have." It's not unlike someone

saying to Gov. Brown, "If you were really the Governor, you'd live in the Governor's mansion; you'd fly in first class; you'd bring your staff with you. If you were really a Governor, you'd act like a Governor!" So Paul starts by defending the fact that he's a real apostle and he has all the rights of an apostle.

Ministers are authenticated by their ministry.

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1–2).

He begins with a torrent of questions, and they're all meant to get a "yes" answer. Paul is free and he's going to show them how to use that freedom. He is an apostle, commissioned by the Lord himself. He saw Jesus on the road to Damascus. Seeing the Lord was one of the criteria for being an apostle (Acts 1:22). Then he reminds them of the role he played in their lives: "**Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?**" In other words, you wouldn't even know Christ if I hadn't come to you. And then he says, "**For you are the seal of my apostleship.**" Back then a seal was used to authenticate something; it was a way of saying, "This is the real deal." Paul says, "You and your life in Christ show I'm a genuine apostle."

People wonder today, how do we authenticate a person as a genuine minister of Jesus Christ. We live in a day of mail order ordinations. Anyone can buy a piece of paper that says they're a teacher or a pastor or a minister or a missionary. How do you know? Who can you trust? Paul tells us here: a minister is authenticated by his ministry. Look at the results of his ministry in people's lives.

It's like in the movie *The King's Speech*. The King of England had a speech impediment so he hired a speech pathologist to help him. And the guy really was helping him. His methods were a bit unorthodox but the King was making real progress under his tutelage. But then the King found out the guy wasn't a real speech pathologist; he had no degrees. He was outraged. He accused his teacher of being a fraud. He demanded some credentials. But the teacher just looked at him and said. "You. You're my credentials. Your ability to speak without a stutter says it all."

That's what Paul is saying and that's what every true servant of Christ ought to be able to say. "Don't be impressed by some piece of paper hanging on my wall. Look at the fruit of my ministry."

When I began my ministry in 1981, it was important to the church I was serving that I be ordained. I had Ray Stedman come and preach at my ordination service. He was getting on in years by then and had a lifetime of fruitful ministry behind him. When he got there he shocked everyone by sharing that he himself had never been ordained! But who could argue he was the real deal? There were thousands of changed lives to prove it.

That's why we should be careful about men who flaunt their degrees and titles and published works as some kind of proof they're real servants of Christ. You see a lot of that today, and it's foolishness. Paul didn't point to his degrees but to changed lives.

Ministers have the right to financial support.

One of the issues that often comes up in all of this is how those who are true servants of Christ make a living. We had a Q & A time at our Men's Retreat last weekend and this question came up: Why do you pay your pastors? What gives them the right to actually make their living preaching and pastoring? And it's a good question. If you pay him, what's to keep him from doing it just for the money? We all know how this has been abused. You don't have to go far to find preachers in \$3,000 suits ready to take your money "for the Lord's work." They'll even autograph your Bible!

So starting in v. 3 Paul goes into a long explanation of why he and others have the right to financial support. He starts by spelling out what these rights are.

My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we not have a right to eat and drink? 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? Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? (verses 3-6).

He says he and those who serve with him have every right to these benefits. They have the right to eat and drink, and to bring their believing wife with them. We know Paul wasn't married, but some who traveled with him were. He says the rest of the apostles, including Cephas (Peter), were married and they brought their wives with them. He also mentions the Lord's brothers. This is interesting because we know from the gospels many of Jesus' brothers didn't believe in him at first, but here we see they'd come to faith and they were preaching the gospel as well. This is a difficult passage for those who believe true ministers shouldn't be married! It's clear they have every right to get married and have a family who is supported as well.

Then in verses 7-14 he gives several reasons why they have this right. First, he refers to examples from everyday life.

Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? (v. 7).

Soldier, farmer, shepherd. What soldier serves at his own expense? What farmer plants a vineyard and can't enjoy the grapes? What kind of shepherd tends a flock and can't use their milk? It's like saying today, Who sells a computer and doesn't make a commission? Who fixes your car and doesn't get paid for it?

I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? 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? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops (verses 8-10).

In the Old Testament God says even oxen ought to be able to eat while they work. And he didn't say that just for oxen: "*for our sake it was written.*" It was written to show that hard workers ought to be rewarded for their labors; they ought to labor in hope of some reward. Paul refers back to this same verse when he writes Timothy about paying elders who also teach, "*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor (pay), especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages'"* (1 Tim 5:17-18). So this not only applies to apostles but to those who serve in the church as pastors and elders. In verses 11-12a he says:

If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more?

He then turns to their sense of intrinsic justice. Paul gets personal here. He talks about his ministry to them: "*we sowed spiritual things in you.*" Throughout the Bible this image of sowing and reaping is used. Jesus told the parable of the sower. He said the seed is the word of God and the soil is the hearts of those who receive it. Paul takes this image and says since we sowed the spiritual seed of God's word in you, shouldn't we reap something material from you? Others have this right, why not us?

There's a principle here about giving we shouldn't miss. There are so many opportunities to give these days: organizations and missionaries and good causes that need our support. We wonder, how do we know where to give? Who should we support? It says right here: give first and foremost to those who sow spiritual things in your life. For most of us that means the bulk of our giving should be to our local church because that's where we're fed spiritual food. That's where our children learn about God. That's where we turn when we're in a crisis. It's not that we can't give elsewhere. Maybe you benefit from a Christian radio program; you should support them for the same reason. Or there may be a missionary you care about and God has laid her on your heart. Give to her. But keep this principle in mind: those who sow spiritually in your life ought to reap materially.

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?

He gives another reason in v. 13: Jewish custom. Back in the Old Testament the priests and the Levites were supported by the offerings made to the temple (Numbers 18:8ff). Everyone knew that. Even the Corinthians who weren't Jewish knew that from how their own pagan temples functioned.

So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel (v. 14).

The last reason he gives is Christ's command itself. This is the clincher. Even Jesus taught this. When Jesus sent out the Twelve he said, *"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give. Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support"* (Mt 10:8-10). Notice he says "freely you received, freely give." You don't charge people; you don't send people a bill in the mail after you preach to them. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't accept their financial help. He also says *"a worker is worthy of his support."*

You can see how important this was to Paul. He wants us to know it's in every way appropriate for someone to expect financial support. I think he wants us to reevaluate our thinking about giving. I've been on the other end of this for about 30 years. I'm supported by the gifts of God's people. I'm very grateful in all my years at CPC, the elders have understood these principles. This church has been generous not just to me but to all our staff. You've trusted us. I've never felt scrutinized over how I spend money. So I'm really not preaching this to the majority of people at CPC. But I've found three ways our thinking can get goofy about all of this.

First of all, some people think we shouldn't support pastors because they don't work that hard. We only work on Sunday morning, right? Some people think that. What **do** you do all day? Okay, you study the Bible but can you really call that work? Well, it **is** work and it can be hard work. Good preachers will spend anywhere from 10-25 hours a week on one sermon. We ask our pastors at CPC to put in at least 50 hours a week. Many of them often put in more, working many weekends and several nights a week.

Another reason people don't want to support their pastors is deep down they really don't trust them. We're all aware that many Christian leaders have abused this right. They manipulate people to give and then take the money and live lavish lifestyles. Some churches have overreacted to this and underpay their pastors. But here's the deal—if you can't trust your pastors in this area, you have a bigger problem than just a money problem. If you trust them to watch over your soul, can't you trust them with

the stewardship of the resources you provide? If you can't trust them, either they shouldn't be in that position or you shouldn't be in that church.

A final reason is just the attitude some people have that says it's **my** money. I worked for it. Why should I have to support someone else? Some of the Corinthians felt that way. So back in 4:7 Paul asked, *"What do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"* Those are good questions. You see, even the money you earned is a gift from God. You could never have earned it unless God gave you the ability to do so. And it's not really your money. It's **his** money he's given to you to manage. And one day he'll hold you accountable for what you did with his money.

Ministers have the right to refuse financial support.

Paul has gone to great lengths to explain and defend his right to financial support. As important as that is, it's not his main point. Notice in the midst of this he said in v. 12, *"Nevertheless, we did not use this right..."* When he came to Corinth, he wouldn't accept financial support. He worked as a tentmaker. This was a problem for some of the Corinthians. They wanted an apostle who acted like an apostle; they wanted a leader, not a servant. Paul didn't measure up. What kind of apostle works to support himself?

But Paul had a reason for giving up this right: *"we endure all things so that we cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ."* In the ancient world teachers of wisdom would come into town and ask for money. If people showed a special interest in their work, they invited them into a higher level of learning—for a higher fee. If people thought Paul was one of them, it might have kept them from believing the gospel. He was different and his message was different. He wasn't after their gold like those other teachers. And the gospel is for everyone, not just those who could afford it. So he preached by day, but in the evening when he was bone tired he made tents. He gave up his rights because he was passionate about reaching people for Christ.

There are times in life when there is something greater at stake than our rights. One of those things is the growth of our brother or sister in Christ. If exercising my rights causes one of them to stumble in their walk, we should deny our rights. Another thing is reaching a person who has yet to come to Christ. Their salvation is more important than my rights. That's going to make a difference in how I relate to my next door neighbor. That's going to make a difference in how I relate to my boss and coworkers. There is something greater at stake than my rights.

But there was another reason Paul gave up this right. It has to do with reward. In v. 15 he explains.

But I have used none of these things And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.

He says his long defense of his right to receive support hasn't been a subtle hint that he wants to reverse his policy now. He says it would be better for him to die than empty him of his boast. What's his boast? His boast is he offers the gospel free of charge. He'd rather die than take support.

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel (verses 16–18).

But why? The essence of what he says is, "This is my reward. My reward is to get no reward (pay) from you." His logic is he can't legitimately boast in his ministry of preaching because God ordered him to do it. There's an irresistible call of God on his life; he has no choice but to preach. If he did it voluntarily, he'd have a reward, but he does it involuntarily; he's under compulsion. You don't reward someone for doing something he's forced to do. So what's his reward? It's to offer the gospel free of charge. He's talking about the sheer delight it gave him to bring the message of God's grace to someone without taking a penny in return. Paul experienced God's grace in his own life. He didn't earn any of it, so he wanted to offer it free of charge, and the joy of doing that was his reward. That's why he didn't exercise his right to be paid. There's something greater at stake than our rights, but there's also something greater received.

It's like if a kid has a bunch of chores to do around the house. He doesn't really have a choice; it's part of being in the family. It's not like his dad came to him and said, "Would you like to do a few chores?" No, his dad says, "You're going to do these chores. But I'll also pay you an allowance for doing them." What Paul says is this, "Listen, God has given me this chore to do. I must preach the gospel. And I could ask for an allowance for doing it. I have the right to that. But I'd rather not. I'd rather do it for nothing. Why? My reward is just to be part of this family. This is how I show that."

There's something greater at stake than our rights, but there's also something greater received.

Sometimes when you deny your rights you do it because something greater than your rights is at stake and something even greater is received. Most of you are like Paul. I think of all the ministry that takes place in this church. Last week we had a great time at our Men's Retreat with an all-time high of 225 men. It took an amazing amount of work to pull that off. And most of the guys who did it did it without being paid a dime. As a matter

of fact, most of them paid to be there! At least they had the right to go for free. But they didn't claim that right. Something greater was at stake but they also knew something greater was received.

It's the same with the dozens of men and women serving in our Sunday school classes, teaching and caring for our children week after week. They put time in all week long to prepare. That takes time, and time is money. But if you tried to stuff a twenty dollar bill in their pocket after class, they'd be offended. They wouldn't think of taking a dime for their ministry.

When I go to Cambodia or the Philippines or Guam I train pastors who serve in tiny churches of mostly poor people. There is no way they could support a pastor. But many of those pastors preach and teach by day and work much of the night to feed their families. Would they like to be supported? You bet they would. Do they have the right to it? Absolutely! But they know there's something greater at stake than their rights and something greater received as well.

There is an old song by Joni Mitchell about a clarinet player standing by the side of the road in a busy city. He wasn't like most street musicians, playing mediocre music with a bored look on his face, hoping for enough small change from passersby to make it through the next day. He was brilliant. He played beautiful music that seemed to come out of his soul. The strange thing was he wasn't collecting money. He did it for free.

Joni Mitchell sings as one haunted by that image. Her life is so different. She sings in concert halls with long black limos driving her here and there. She has lots of money coming in from those who enjoy her music. She reflects on the fact that him playing for free shows he had something she had lost. Not only did he believe in what he was doing, but there was a delight in it.

*Now me I play for fortune
And those velvet curtain calls
I've got a black limousine
And two handsome men
Escorting me to the halls
And I play if you have the money
Or if you're some kind of friend to me
But the one man band
By the quick lunch stand
He was playing real good, for free.*

I think Paul was like that. I think you and I can be like that: people who know there is something greater at stake than our rights, but people who also know there is something greater received.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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