

## A9 BIBLE STUDY: I CORINTHIANS #9

*Scripture of Lesson: I Corinthians 9: 1~27*

### 1. Self-denial of God's servants for the gospel's sake: v. 1-18

Apostle Paul, as a way of encouraging the Christians in Corinth to follow his true example, explains how he has denied the rightful privileges as a minister of God so that he may have a reward. Paul cites the following privileges that he voluntarily gives up:

- a. Power to eat and to drink [v. 4], indicating the privilege of being served by others as ministers. Where there were strong supporters of his ministry, Paul stayed at their homes and received feeding and care. But oftentimes he rented rooms and had to take care of the needs of himself and his companions, meaning cooking, washing and other tasks as needed for their daily living.
- b. Power to accompany a sister or a wife as Peter and brothers of the Lord did [v. 5]. Celibacy was not mandatory during the early centuries and certainly Paul did not consider it necessary. As for himself and his companions such as Barnabas, though they were married men, chose not to accompany their wives and families for the sake of the evangelical work. Apparently, Paul and Barnabas believed accompaniment of their spouses would be more of hindrance than help to their ministry work.
- c. Power to be free of work to support themselves financially [v. 6, 7, 9]. In today's Christian ministry almost every minister/ priest wants to be assured of some sort of financial support to enable them to be engaged in the ministry work without having to making a living aside. However, in the first century apostles and other evangelical workers sometimes had to work to earn money to support themselves. Paul writes why he does not exercise this rightful power in v. 12: *"If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power, but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ."*

The true example of Paul's attitude towards the ministry of the gospel is perhaps best expressed in v. 15-18:

*But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.*

*Discussion topics:*

1. Compare and discuss Paul's ministry example and today's prevalent Christian ministry and their impacts.
2. Compare Jesus' ministry and Paul's ministry.

### 2. Motives of Paul's ministry: v. 19-27

Paul's desire in his ministry work was to earn as many souls as possible to the Lord Jesus. So he did not discriminate social classes [free and slaves], ethnic backgrounds [Jews, Greeks and other ethnicities] and economic strata [rich and poor/ weak]. Towards this end Paul chose to keep himself under the Lord's control and be in subjection to the Spirit's guidance always. What a marvelous example as a servant of God! Compare Paul's attitude with Jonah's attitude when he was told to go on an evangelical mission to Nineveh.

Some of the apostles focused their ministry on the Jewish population during the first century. But Paul was sensitive to the Spirit's leading the ministry to the Gentiles as well as the Jews scattered in all territories. Paul had the

heart of Christ, showing tender empathy and compassion towards the socially low classes of slaves, the poor, the sick and the oppressed.

Paul was mindful of the Lord's expectation towards His servants. Always keenly aware of his identity as a servant for Christ, Paul wanted to do everything possible to gain reward from his Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus' expectation towards His servants is expressed in the following verse, Matt 24: 45-46:

*"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing."*

Thus Paul expressed his resolution for his ministerial work in v. 27:

*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

In v. 26 Paul compared himself as a race runner who runs to gain a prize. He did not want to run the race of Christ's gospel ministry and be disqualified for any manner of living or attitude of his that might mar the credit. There was this wholesome fear in Paul's heart and mind which kept him focused on his race as commissioned by the Lord Jesus.

The word "reward" appears 29 times in NT and 39 times in OT, total 68 times. God is a rewarder of the righteous for their good works and of the evil for their evil deeds. The rewards of the faithful ministers of God will be great.

*So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. [Matt 19: 28]*

*Discussion topics:*

- 1. What can lay people do to be a help to those who are in God's ministry/ priesthood?*
- 2. What rewards do you aspire to receive from the Lord when your life is over?*
- 3. Paul had a wholesome fear about his attitude for the ministry of God. What fear do you have in serving God?*