

1 Corinthians 9:1-18 – Limiting My Liberty

February 22, 2026

1. Background

2. Why should a pastor be paid?

A. As an apostle, Paul had the right to be paid for his work.

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship 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 (ESV)

Am I not free?...

Am I not an apostle?...

Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?...

Are not you my workmanship 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.

This is my defense to those who would examine me. 1 Corinthians 9:3 (ESV)

Do we not have the right to eat and drink? 1 Corinthians 9:4 (ESV)

Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 1 Corinthians 9:5 (ESV)

*Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?
1 Corinthians 9:6 (ESV)*

...if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 7:39 (ESV)

*...older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.
1 Timothy 5:2 (ESV)*

B. It is common sense that people should be paid for their work.

*Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?
1 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV)*

C. The law says people should be rewarded for their work.

*Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same?
1 Corinthians 9:8 (ESV)*

For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 1 Corinthians 9:9 (ESV)

*Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake,...
1 Corinthians 9:10 (ESV)*

...because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. 1 Corinthians 9:10 (ESV)

If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 1 Corinthians 9:11 (ESV)

D. Other pastors are paid for their work.

If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?...
1 Corinthians 9:12 (ESV)

E. The priests in the temple were paid for their work.

Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?
1 Corinthians 9:13 (ESV)

F. Jesus said those who preach the gospel should earn their living from the gospel.

In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. 1 Corinthians 9:14 (ESV)

...no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. Matthew 10:10 (ESV)

3. Out of love for people, we should limit our liberty.

...Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right,... 1 Corinthians 9:12 (ESV)

But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision.... 1 Corinthians 9:15 (ESV)

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an **obstacle** in the way of the gospel of Christ. 1 Corinthians 9:12 (ESV)

For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 1 Thessalonians 2:9 (ESV)

And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. 2 Corinthians 11:9 (ESV)

...For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. 1 Corinthians 9:15 (ESV)

For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 1 Corinthians 9:16 (ESV)

For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. 1 Corinthians 9:17 (ESV)

What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. 1 Corinthians 9:18 (ESV)

Conclusion

- In Jesus, I am free to do almost anything, but to love people and for the progress of the gospel, I will give up anything.

Life Group Questions

2. **Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-4.** What can we learn from this about paying pastors and missionaries?
3. **Read 1 Corinthians 9:5.** What does this teach us about a church's responsibility to take care of a pastor and his wife? How important is the health of that marriage?
4. **Read 1 Corinthians 9:9-11.** What does this teach us about how to apply Old Testament laws in a New Testament world?
5. **Read 1 Corinthians 9:12.** What does this teach us about when we should consider restricting our freedom in Jesus?
6. **Read 1 Corinthians 9:15.** Jesus required Paul to preach the gospel. Paul didn't expect to be rewarded for doing his job. By his own choice, Paul decided to present the gospel free of charge to everyone, and he was confident he would be rewarded for it. How does knowing Jesus will reward us when we limit our liberties for the sake of the gospel change the way you feel about voluntarily restricting your freedoms for the sake of other people?
7. What are ways we might limit our freedoms today for the sake of better communicating the gospel? Examples are:
 1. Is alcohol, or other lifestyle habits, causing others to think less of Jesus and me?
 2. Do I need to limit my screen time so I can be genuinely present with the people around me who need to hear about Jesus?