

Title: Ministry for Free

Text: 1 Corinthians 9.1-12a (14?)

Theme: Giving up your right to your right.

Series: 1 Corinthians #34

Prop Stmt. Just because you have a right does not mean that you have to exercise it.

It appears to me that some families have an unwritten motto of who can out-miser the others. Holiday gatherings feature discussions on who saved the most, who paid the least, who found the best deals, who uses the most coupons, who is still wearing socks that were hand knit from wool that was hand spun from a sheep that was hand raised, and fed from grass that was hand planted and hand watered from 1938. Anyone who pays for coffee in a restaurant must think that money grows on trees, or they are the Rockefellers (a favorite target for many people). Your value is determined by how poor and miserly you appear to be – even if you are worth millions.

Other families have an opposite creed. If you do not serve the best food, eat at the best restaurants, drive the finest cars, send your children to Europe for the summer, or wear the latest fashions, you do not measure up. Your value is determined by how rich you appear to be – even though you are incredibly in debt and actually worth nothing on paper.

There are churches that similar functional creeds and mottos. One pastor I know of prefers to drive smaller cars. Some of the leaders in the church took him aside one day and told him, the car has to go. He needs to drive a bigger car. He did not want a bigger car, he was fine with a smaller car. But they said no, you are a reflection of this congregation, and if you drive a small car, it looks as if we are a miserly church and we do not take care of our pastor and we want it to be very clear that we take care of our pastor. Besides that, you work hard, you have an education, and people need to see that, they need to see that there are some benefits to an education and working hard. Now, you go out and get yourself a bigger car. He did. But, cars do nothing for him. He really doesn't care.

Now, take the same guy and put him in another church setting, and he could have the church leaders pulling him off to the side saying, "Hey the people are talking. They think that you are trying to be a little too showy by that car, or that suit, or that, ring – or whatever." How can a man of God, spend money on a new tie (when they strangle you anyway) when there are people in the world who do not even have shoes?

I mean, how much should a pastor make anyway? And if we do pay him, how should he spend it? After all, if we give the money for his salary, shouldn't we have a say in how he uses it? Look at his family! His kids wear designer clothes – or – Look at his family his wife dresses like she fell out of an Amish horse buggy. Whoa! I have your attention now – don't I? You didn't know that I listened to your conversations did you? - I'm kidding, but my poor wife is about to crawl under the pew.

This text appears to be about money and paying the preacher. But actually, that is not the main idea of this text. The issue of compensation for those who provide leadership in the church is actually the illustration of a deeper issue. This morning, we are going to be looking at the part of the text that deals with the illustration. The illustration serves a greater point. The point is this. Just because I have a right, does not mean that I have to exercise that right. In fact, if exercising my right becomes a barrier to unity, then I am going to give up my freedom to exercise that right.

Now, when you read this text, what stands out here? It is all the questions – isn't it? I counted 17 questions in the first 14 verses. (Technically, in the Greek NT, there are 16 – the NIV makes two out of one for readability.) So, with that in view, this sermon is organized by two big questions that summarize the rest of these questions.

1. How do you view your leaders? (vs. 1-3)

In these three verses Paul reminds his readers of his position and the evidence of that position. He seems to be defending his position a little bit, but that really is not his major concern. That is a problem that he addresses in 2 Corinthians, but not here as much. His point here is to clearly establish the fact that he is a leader. In fact, he is not any old leader, he is an apostle. And, in addition that, he is an apostle who started the church. That gives him some legitimate clout and some leverage. Why is he so concerned that the people understand his position of authority? Is it because some of the "natives are restless" and he is pulling rank as the chief? No, that really is not the point. He is showing that just because you occupy a position of leadership, does not mean that you have to exercise all of the rights that come with it. In fact, it appears that since Paul did not exercise his rights as an apostle, that some were actually questioning whether or not he was really that great of a leader. Shouldn't a leader be rich, powerful, respected and intimidating? Paul is not any of that. He was rather unimpressive.

But, Paul makes it a point to re-establish his position as an apostle with them. Why? I think it is pretty clear. Paul wants them to know of the position that is his by rights. He wants that understood without question, because...Paul gives up the rights to that position for the greater good. He did not live with the benefits of his leadership because he was a weak leader, he gave up the exercise of those rights because there was something more important that was at stake. He establishes this point through a series of questions and then a statement.

Am I free? The answer is – of course I am. In fact, the wording that he uses makes it clear that the correct answer to each of these questions is an emphatic YES!!

Now, as a little side note, this text talks about the position or the office of an apostle. Apostle is a term that is used in a generic sense and it is a title that is used in a very specific sense. The word apostle, comes from a Greek word (apostolos) which means – "one who is sent with a message." You can tell one kid to go tell another kid that dinner is ready. The kid doing the telling is an apostle. He has been sent on a mission with a message. But in the NT, there were a group of 12 men who actually occupied the

position of an apostle. There were qualifications for this position such as the performance of signs, wonders and miracles (2 Cor. 12.12) and (based on our text) one who had seen the resurrected Lord, and one whose ministry was marked with power and changed lives. The point is, Paul is the real deal. He is very passionate about these people understanding this because he wants them to see the bigger picture. He not only occupied the position of a leader, he was in the rather unique position of being commissioned by God as an apostle. Therefore, he had apostolic authority. He was a human author of a major portion of the Bible. He had rights! He was free! He was not under their authority, they were under his. (that is not true for me – I am not an apostle.) He could do what he wanted, but he didn't.

How do you view your leaders? This is a two-way street and unfortunately on this issue, the church is full of stories of too much traffic crossing the yellow line. In the church the leader can be mistreated and feel used, unappreciated and become defensive. He concludes, the church wants to work me to death, gossip about me, ruin my family, pay me peanuts and call it living by faith. On the other hand, a leader can abuse the church by being lazy, domineering, and self-centered. In that case, the church concludes, this guy wants to do nothing, answer to no one, and get paid like a Philadelphia lawyer. Sometimes this happens, and the result is not pretty. A new guy becomes a pastor, and entrenched leadership says, “Look son, I was in this church before you were born, and I will be here long after you are gone. I have lived through 14 pastors, so, I am not very impressed. You go over there, run your programs, preach your sermons and make your visits, but leave the business of the church to the rest of us. Or, the pastor can look how to cut every angle, manipulate the people and use the church to get ahead professionally. If the church grows, then my resume will look more attractive to a big time pulpit somewhere where they pay better and expect fewer hours. That is mutual manipulation. The church uses the leader and the leader uses the church. That may be how business runs, but that is not church.

v.3 “This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me.” Look at the evidence. I am an apostle – you can't deny it. I have a position of authority and with that authority come certain rights. Now....

2. What “rights” do the leaders have? (vs. 4-14)

A. Leaders have the right to eat and drink what they want. (4)

I found it interesting that a number of commentators think that Paul is referring to the right of a leader of having meals at the expense of the church. I really do not think that is the point. Frankly, I think it misses the big idea altogether. What has Paul been talking about in the previous chapter? What is he talking about here? The big idea is that just because you have a right, does not mean that you have to or even should exercise it. The immediate illustration of this principle is dealing with food that has been associated with pagan rituals. All that Paul is saying is I can eat and drink what I want, but that does not mean that I do! Is this principle only for leaders? No! Remember, in this section, Paul is using his own life as an illustration for all of us. As your leader, he is saying, I naturally

have more privileges than others. However, if I, who has even more privileges, do not exercise those privileges or rights, then you, who may not have as much privilege as I, do not need to exercise yours.

B. Leaders have the right to get married. (5-6)

As an aside, there has always been speculation about Paul's marital status. Was he divorced, was he widowed, had he always been single? We don't know about his past in that regard. We know that at this point, Paul who was single, is saying – look, I could get married if I wanted to. He had that right. And he is saying that if I did, then I would be traveling with my wife just like the other apostles do, and like the brothers of Jesus do, and like Peter does. Of course, if Paul did that, then the expenses and logistics would change, wouldn't they?

Another aside here; there have been some traditions that have crept into church history and in some circles have become doctrine. Sadly, it is doctrine that is based folklore at the expense of the real truth. One of those is that Mary was a perpetual virgin. That is simply not true. Jesus had biological brothers and sisters. That is clear from this text (v.5) and from the gospels as well (Matthew 12.46; 13.55-56). Another tradition that started to gain popularity in the 400's was the idea that if you were really going to be spiritual, you would not get married. Sadly, that tradition became doctrine in some circles as well and is in obvious conflict with this passage. Leaders have the right to get married. Now, I want you to see how this all fits together.

What happens, in a practical sense to a person who is in ministry and is single? People tend to think that "Oh, he does not need much money to live on – it's just him." Or, he is expected to work 120 hours a week, because, after all, what else is he going to do? That attitude is not unique to the church. That attitude is often the case in the business world also. A single person may be expected to work later, or weekends, or travel, because he or she does not have a life, like a married person. Did the church at Corinth assume that since Paul was single that they had no financial responsibility to him? When a man gets married, and has a family, he has to provide for that family. The reality is, it does cost more to have and raise a family than to live on your own. But, while that may cost the church more, the leader has the right to get married. But, I think that there may be something else that is happening here.

C. Leaders have the right to be compensated for their work. (7-14)

Notice verse 6. Who does Paul mention along with himself? It is Barnabas. What do you know about Barnabas? Back in the end of Acts 4, we find out that there is a wealthy land owner in the church whose name is Joseph. Joseph sells some of his land in order to raise money for the needs of the early church. Was he also single? Did he reason that, since he had no wife or children, that there was no purpose for him to hang on to this land and he was free to donate the proceeds to the church? I do not know. But he did and the result was such an encouragement to the early church, the people called him Barnabas because the name means encouragement. Now, what may have happened is that because

Barnabas was now perceived as this wealthy guy, that when he was ministering with Paul in a church, the people may have assumed, this guy does not need any money, so they never felt any responsibility to compensate him. That could have been an influencing factor. The other obvious point was, that Paul and Barnabas would sow tents and would earn an income when they were in a city for a while so that they would not be a financial burden upon a church. They were single, they were flexible, they were low maintenance and because of that, it would have been very easy for the church to take them for granted. Paul did not take compensation for his work, but he makes it very, very clear that leaders have the right to be compensated for their work.

That is the point that he hammers over and over in this section.

1) Illustrations from life teach you that. (7)

v. 7 – Does a soldier pay his own way?

- Does a farmer not eat his own crops?

- Does a cattleman not eat from his own flock?

2) The OT law teaches you that. (vs.8 – 12a)

Those who labor spiritually among you, are worthy of being compensated materially. Honestly, it can be a little awkward for you and for me. In the short run, it would be convenient if the staff were all independently wealthy and were completely self-sufficient and were of no financial dependence upon the church.

Many years ago, W.A. Criswell became the pastor of the 1st Baptist Church in Dallas, TX. The church was a rather prestigious church and it had a tradition of paying its pastor rather handsomely. Dr. Criswell, asked some of the members of his board if they would invest some of his money for him, which they did. Since many of these men were oil guys, they invested it in oil and Dr. Criswell eventually became a very wealthy man. For the last 20 years of his pastoral ministry, he returned his salary to the church. The church had him for free. He had the right to be compensated, but since he did not need it, he returned it – which on the one hand was wonderful, but I have always felt sorry for the poor chap who had to follow him and endure all of the comments from people who said, “You know that last guy did all of this for free.”

Rick Warren has written a couple of books that have personally earned him a ton of money. Rick figured up all that his church has ever paid him and has returned it all to his church. That way, it's just not an issue. Money can make things funny, because it has a way of revealing the idols of our hearts.

When I was still an infant, my grandfather invested \$100 for me in a mutual fund. I am now 45, have you any idea what that is worth now? Nothing! The fund managers were crooks and the whole thing went belly up around 1972. But, I do have an idea for a book. Maybe, some day, I could serve here for free. That would be fun, for me. And if I did, I do not think that would ever tell you.

The point is clear from v.12 and v.14. Those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. That is what the church is responsible for and that is a point well taken. But, do you see what I am responsible for? I need to look at the fact that just because I have that right, does not mean that I am demanding or heavy handed about that. So, please, don't miss this. The big idea of this entire passage is not about marriage, it is not about money it is about relationships and rights. Just because a person has the right, does not mean that he has to exercise that right. Relationships are more important than rights.