

Promoting the Gospel with Money

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. You may like to have open the Bible reading from 1 Corinthians on page 931, 1 Corinthians chapter 9.

And as we indicated at the start, this is part of our sermon series on the theme of promoting the gospel in various ways, and today promoting the gospel with money. So I'm pleased to see that most of you didn't read the preaching program, so you're still here.

Traditionally, when you have money on the program, everybody goes away for the weekend, so I'm pleased it's not an empty church. Well, let me pray. God, our Father, as we come before your word, we do pray that we will meet you and the Lord Jesus Christ in your word, that you will change our hearts and challenge us, encourage us, and stir us up to love and good works for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of your gospel.

Amen. Amen. No doubt you've been aware of the debate in recent months about the new industrial relations laws for this country. Will workers' rights be adequately protected?

Will workers be paid well? They're the basic questions that have caused so much anxiety, and there are plenty of people still watching fairly eagerly to see whether this system is going to be fair and going to deliver the goods for the workers of our country.

[1 : 24] The basic premise, of course, that creates the dispute is, well, we want to be paid well. In fact, we want to be paid more. Well, imagine the Apostle Paul before the fair pay commissioner.

At first, the beginning of 1 Corinthians 9 looks like it could be his defense or argument to a fair pay commissioner, his claim to be paid as an apostle of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet what is so unusual here, front page of the age stuff, really, is that he renounces all those rights, in effect, to be paid.

When you imagine that there's some dispute that's brought before the fair pay commissioner or the industrial relations commission, and it's all grounded in the fact that somebody actually doesn't want to be paid, or a group of people don't want to be paid.

I mean, if that happened, that would be front page of the news and the beginning of both the 6 o'clock news and all the shows that follow the 6 o'clock news that call themselves current affairs. This is unusual stuff here, Paul's argument.

[2 : 29] It gives us a great snapshot of his motivations as a minister of the gospel. What he does is basically build what's called a logical syllogism, really.

Two premises that lead to, necessarily, a conclusion. It's a standard sort of Greek logical sort of statement, in effect. It's a bit like those ones that say, All dogs have tails.

This thing has a tail. Therefore, it's a dog. Now, that's actually not logically true. All dogs have tails. This is a dog. Therefore, it has a tail.

That's logically true. Paul makes two premises that lead to a necessary conclusion. I am an apostle. Apostles have a right to be paid.

Therefore, I have a right to be paid. That's logically true. That's logically true. And that's, in effect, the sort of argument that he runs in 1 Corinthians 9. Except that having drawn the conclusion, I have a right to be paid.

[3 : 33] He then goes on to say, but I've yielded those rights. I'm not claiming my rights to be paid. It's a very striking conclusion that he draws from this argument.

The first premise of that logical syllogism is, I am an apostle. He argues that in verses 1 and 2. And the reason why he needs to argue it is that it seems there were people in Corinth who downplayed or dismissed his apostleship.

They could have done so on a number of grounds, and we're not quite sure perhaps which, if any, or all of these maybe they would have taken. For example, it seems that perhaps because he was a tent maker, a manual labourer, some thought that was a fairly demeaning task.

He wasn't a high-flown orator or rhetorician, the sorts of people that would be paid for speaking out publicly. And so maybe that led them to think, well, he's not really the full quid as an apostle.

It seems perhaps that some of them thought, well, one of the claims of being an apostle was you've seen the risen Lord Jesus Christ. That's actually what, in many respects, qualified you to be an apostle.

[4 : 46] And Paul, of course, wasn't one of the 11 that survived of Jesus' original 12 disciples. He wasn't there on Easter morning to see the risen Lord Jesus and the empty tomb.

He wasn't there the next day or on the road to Demais or on the beach or even in the crowd of 500 to whom Jesus appeared before he ascended into heaven. That argument seems to be behind the way Paul describes himself in 1 Corinthians 15.

As to one untimely born, he was also an apostle to whom the Lord Jesus had appeared on the road to Damascus after Jesus had ascended to heaven even.

So maybe on those sorts of grounds, the Corinthians didn't think much of Paul and his claims to be an apostle. Paul, and certainly the issue of Paul's authority and the authority of the church in general, runs through 1 Corinthians as well as indeed in 2 Corinthians.

That's why Paul begins with those four rhetorical questions at the beginning of this chapter. Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

[5 : 54] And all four of those questions demand the sort of answer, of course. Am I not free? Of course I'm free. He's actually been arguing that in effect in the previous chapter.

Am I not an apostle? Of course I'm an apostle. And then the next two rhetorical questions, all both demanding affirmative answers, in effect pick up some of the grounds of being an apostle.

What makes somebody to be an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Yes, of course I have. Referring to the road to Damascus when Paul was converted. Yes, it was late, in effect, after Jesus had ascended to heaven.

But it was still the real encounter with the real risen Lord Jesus Christ. It wasn't a ghost or an hallucination or an idea or a dream or a trance. It was the real risen Jesus whom Paul met on that road to Damascus.

Therefore, he's qualified at that level to be an apostle. And the fourth rhetorical question, in a sense, has got a bit of a sting in it. He says, are you not my work in the Lord?

[6 : 57] That is, are not you, the Corinthian church which Paul himself had, in effect, begun and planted some years before writing this letter? Are you not evidence that I'm an apostle?

And, of course, the sting in the tail of that question is, if I'm not an apostle, then you're not a real church. And, of course, they are, and he is. And that's what he's claiming in these first two verses.

So he says in verse two, if I'm not an apostle to others, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. That is the fruit of the preaching of the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, the church which Paul had founded alongside others as well, as we know from the Acts of the Apostles.

Well, those questions and that statement really in verse two are Paul's defense that he is an apostle.

From verse three, he moves into the second premise of the logical syllogism, that is, I am an apostle. Now the next thing is, apostles have the right to be paid.

[8 : 01] And he has a string of different arguments that are used to make that claim. The first is there are other apostles who have rights and are paid as part of those rights.

Verse three, he says, this is my defense to those who would examine me. And then he asks again some rhetorical questions which pick up the rights that other apostles have.

Do we not have the right to our food and drink? That is, other apostles do. Ought not we? We should. That's the thrust of the question.

Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Kephass, that is, Peter? Well, they do. We ought to as well. That is, that's the right of an apostle.

You can see because other apostles have that right. So ought we. Paul and Barnabas and others, whoever he's with. Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?

[9 : 04] That is, he's working as a tent maker, but that doesn't disqualify him from being an apostle. That seems to be a means by which they're putting him down and saying, well, you're not really an apostle. You're a tent maker.

Not at all, he says. Apostles have the right to refrain from working for a living. The others do. Well, why do I working for a living that ought not disqualify me from being an apostle?

He goes on then with some secular examples in the next verse. The soldier, the vine planter, and also the shepherd. Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service?

Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk? That is, in the secular world, a person is rewarded for their labor.

They're paid for their labor. Somebody pays the soldier to be in military service. The person who plants the vine will expect fruit from the vine. The person who's a shepherd will expect, in this case, milk from the animals that that person is tending and looking after.

[10 : 09] The implication of the argument is that in the secular world, somebody is paid for their labor. The apostle's labor is to preach the gospel. And an apostle ought to be paid for such a ministry.

He adds to his argument now with an Old Testament claim, an Old Testament quote. Do I say this on human authority?

Verse 8 says. This chapter, as you can see, is full of rhetorical questions. And often in Greek in particular, and in English to an extent as well, a question's answer is clear from the way the question is asked.

Here the question's answer. Do I say this on human authority? No. And then the next question. Does not the law also say the same? Yes, that is, the law does say.

The point that I've been arguing in the previous verses. And then he quotes from Deuteronomy 25. It's written in the law of Moses. You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

[11 : 09] That is, when an ox is doing your harvesting and so on, the ox is not to be muzzled so that as it does the harvesting, it is allowed to eat some of the harvest as it goes.

Now the point of the analogy from the, or the quote from the Old Testament is, this is not just about a dumb animal, an ox. That is, if God is concerned in his law to allow even an ox to receive fruit of its labor as it harvests, how much more does God expect a person to enjoy the fruit of its or his or her labor?

So the end of verse 9 says, is it for oxen that God is concerned? Well, it's not implying that God's not at all concerned for oxen.

The implication is God is even more concerned for people. Verse 10, or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake. For whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop.

That is, a laborer deserves to be paid for his or her labor. And in particular, if you're plowing, then you ought to receive or reap the rewards from that particular labor.

[12 : 28] Just like the soldier, just like the vine planter, just like the shepherd of verse 7, just like the other apostles that are mentioned in verses 4 to 6 as well. Paul then explicitly applies this to his work in Corinth.

A bit like a farmer, he's actually sown seed, the seed of the gospel. And he is saying that I have a right, I deserve to reap back material benefit by way of pay for that labor.

So he says in verse 11, If we've sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more?

That is, as somebody who's sown the seeds of the gospel, it is his right as an apostle to be, in effect, paid or remunerated for such labor from the fruit of sowing the seed of the gospel.

That is, from those who actually become Christians and come to faith in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's his right. And at this point, we would expect Paul to drive home his claim to the ancient Corinthian fair pay commissioner, or its equivalent.

[13 : 41] But this is where he twists it all and turns it on its head. At the end of verse 12, he says, 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.

You see, the Corinthians probably thought, because Paul's not claiming to be paid, because he's working as a tent maker, maybe because he really didn't see the risen Lord Jesus until after Jesus had ascended to heaven, much later than any other apostles, he's not really an apostle.

He lacks authority, is how they were trying to dismiss him. Paul's saying, No, the reason I'm a tent maker, and the reason I didn't demand payment for preaching the gospel, is not because I'm not an apostle.

It's because I don't want to put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Jesus Christ. See, what drives Paul is not to be paid so much.

I mean, he has to be paid, and he works to be paid. But the thing that drives him is the gospel being proclaimed unhindered. That is, when you're preaching to somebody who's not a Christian, you don't sort of set a fee for preaching the gospel.

[14 : 56] Paul, in other places, and the New Testament in other places, make it clear that Christians ought to be, and are obligated to support and fund and pay for Christian ministry, both to themselves and to others.

But for those who are not Christians, the Jews and the pagans of Corinth, when Paul first went there, he said, If I was to charge, in effect, is what he's saying, if I'm to charge a fee for preaching the gospel, then the gospel actually becomes something people pay for.

It actually corrupts the nature of the gospel itself, which is the gospel of free grace from God, mercifully given to us, though we don't deserve it. We don't pay to receive the gospel or pay to enter the kingdom of heaven.

So Paul is saying the very nature of preaching the gospel to non-Christians is to be freely done. How then is Paul supported? By his own labor, and maybe by some funding that comes from Christians in other places, as indeed we see in various places in the New Testament, that sort of partnership or funding of gospel ministry to others by Christian churches for the sake of people elsewhere who are not yet Christian.

That's the argument Paul is trying to make clear here to the Corinthian church. He's certainly not saying that gospel ministers ought to be unpaid. He's not saying that gospel ministers ought to have, in a sense, a secular payment, you know, tent maker or actuary or something like that, and then on the side be gospel ministers, although there are people who do that, and that's fine.

[16 : 26] But he's saying that Christians ought to support Christian ministry, but we ought not to expect non-Christians to pay for receiving the ministry of the gospel. If they respond with faith and become Christians, that is, they then become the harvest from the seed of the gospel sown, then they become, as Christians already, obligated to fund and pay for Christian ministry, not only to themselves, but beyond their own environment as well.

Paul goes on to give two more reasons in the verses that follow about why payment for gospel ministry and payment for apostles is right, obligatory and appropriate.

Firstly, he refers again to the Old Testament, this time by way of illustration than quote, and the illustration is the Old Testament temple. In Old Testament times, the tribe of Levi was set aside to be the priestly tribe of the people of Israel.

That priestly tribe owned no land, they didn't therefore have crops or animals by which, in a sense, they were supported and could live. Rather, they were set apart to receive the sacrifices and offerings that the other tribes would make to God.

They were there to minister the temple and look after the temple, the tabernacle before that, before the temple was built. They were there, in fact, also to teach Old Testament law and to guard the Ark of the Covenant and so on.

[17 : 53] How were they supplied and provided for? Well, basically, by the provisions from the other tribes through the sacrifices and tithes. And so if you read in the book of Leviticus, for example, and elsewhere in the early bits of the Old Testament, when various sacrifices were made, for some of them, many of them, in fact, a portion was there for the priest and the priest's family and dependents.

The rest might be burnt and offered to God, but portions were able to be kept of sacrifices, tithes, freewill offerings and so on, specifically regulated in the Old Testament law so that the priests were supplied and provided for by the giving, in a sense, of the rest of the people of God.

Paul's argument, then, in verse 13, is that in the same way, not by sacrifices, which are done away with because Jesus sacrifices once for all, but in the same way, the people of God as a whole are under obligation to provide for the ministry, in a sense, that is set apart by the people of God in the New Covenant as it was in the Old Covenant.

The clincher for Paul's argument and his final point in his argument comes in verse 14. This time, it's the words of Jesus himself. In the same way, as priests were supported in the Old Testament through the temple, by the sacrifices and offerings, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

Probably, the reference is back to Luke 10 where Jesus said that the laborer deserves to be paid in the context of the ministry or the labor of preaching the gospel.

[19 : 37] Well, that's Paul's argument. It's an argument of the rights of an apostle or a gospel preacher to be paid and supported by Christians. For the sake of those who are not Christians and for the sake of the gospel being unhindered, there are times when Paul would give up his right to be paid so that ministry would go to people who are not Christians.

But as we see not only here but in other parts of Corinthians and in Philippians in particular, he expects Christians even in one place to support gospel ministry in other places for the sake of people who are not yet Christians in those places and to fund that properly and generously and appropriately.

So Paul in this passage goes to lengths to show that though he's got every right to be paid by the Corinthians for the ministry he exercised there, he gave up that right.

I am an apostle. Apostles have a right to be paid. Therefore, I've got a right to be paid. All of that is true. But for the sake of the gospel being unhindered to people not yet Christian, when I came to Corinth, I did not exercise my rights as an apostle to be paid for that ministry in Corinth.

Not because he's lacking apostleship, not because he's a second rate apostle, not because he's a tent maker, not because he lacks general authority, not because he was late in seeing the risen Lord Jesus, but because for the sake of the gospel he gave up his rights in Corinth.

[21 : 13] The same sort of principles actually in the previous chapter when Paul says if it hinders a Christian for me to eat meat, I won't eat meat. That is, for the sake of the gospel and people growing as Christians, he's prepared to give up any of his rights so that the gospel will be unhindered.

What do we learn from this? We learn, firstly, that the gospel is to be a major top priority for Christians.

That's what drives Paul and his ministry. And it should be no different from the Corinthians either, as indeed the whole of 1 and 2 Corinthians makes clear.

The gospel is the priority. Remember what we saw two weeks ago, the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Not only are we to pray for the Lord of the harvest to raise up labourers into the harvest, we are to give so that labourers are funded to go into the harvest and reap the harvest of the gospel in an unhindered way.

We've got to remember that the need for labourers remains in every part of the world. As I said two weeks ago, there's no place in the world, really, that there is still not a need for more labourers for the sake of the gospel.

[22 : 38] And yes, while it's obvious in the Middle East or in Russia or Nepal or somewhere like that for more labourers for the gospel to go there, look around Shopping Town and our streets and it's the same here as well.

And in all of this context, we must remember how wealthy we are amongst the wealthiest generations that have ever lived on this earth. The challenge of this is to match the gospel needs with our wealth so that our giving will fund more gospel ministry to a harvest that is plentiful but where the labourers are few.

In that context, we've got to remember that only Christians will fund the ministry of the gospel. Yes, there are many worthy and good causes around and many in our society, no matter how generously or stingily will toss a coin in a bucket at an intersection or send off a check to Red Cross or the tsunami appeal or something like that and they're good causes but only Christians will fund the ministry of the gospel so that people come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is this heightened priority and strategy and obligation on us as Christians in particular to fund the ministry of the gospel and not just be diverted into other numerous good causes which many people may well support in our society.

The priority of the gospel must be in effect paramount. How will this work out in practice? Some examples. We support Andy Priddo who works at Melbourne University Christian Union on a campus of several thousand students doing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees the vast majority of whom are not Christian.

[24 : 40] It's a huge mission field in effect. It's got a bigger population really than the parish of Holy Trinity Doncaster in many respects. Andy struggles to get full financial support so that he's paid adequately and properly for his ministry.

If Christians like us were more generous in our giving for gospel priority then he would be released from the burden of financial strain and freer and more unhindered to do the gospel ministry on that campus and if we were even more generous we'd be able to fund more workers in a place where certainly labour is a few and the harvest is indeed very plentiful.

Ridley College which trains people to be Anglican ministers to be missionaries youth ministers children's ministers lay ministers and so on suffers from chronic financial shortage as I well know as the vice chairman of its council.

If Christians like us were more generous in our giving then not only would the college be released from the burden of finances that is so crippling but indeed more people would be able to be trained to be labourers where the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few.

If we increase the fees to what they really cost there'd be no students there they couldn't afford it. It's funded in effect large well not only by fees but by generous donations but oh that they were more generous.

[26 : 10] We have a huge potential in our area of Doncaster and surrounding suburbs for ministry to international students not least to Chinese students. We've taken a step of faith this year in employing Ben to be 12 hours a week only part time youth minister for our Mandarin congregation training some of those to be youth leaders and to some extent reaching out.

Wouldn't it be great for the gospel if next year when he finishes his training we could jump all the way to employing him full time so that we reach out much more effectively to international students in our area and beyond and there are hundreds and hundreds here and sure many of them will go back to China or Taiwan or Hong Kong or wherever they come from when they finish their studies but what a missionary opportunity that we might lead to more of those folk in Australia becoming Christians and whether they go back to their countries what great missionary opportunities they have back there in some ways a cheaper missionary strategy than training up say English speakers to learn Cantonese or Mandarin and send them into a foreign culture to be missionaries so there's a gospel strategy to put before us for next year can we increase our generous giving for the sake of the gospel so that we can raise up yet another full time laborer not for our own benefit so much as the benefit of those many non-Christians international students who come into our midst sometimes I hear people whinge that we have lots of paid staff at Holy

Trinity in some senses we do although almost all of them are part time but apart from our ministry to Christians within our congregation which is part of the job and for which we have obligation to pay we have each of us on staff a significant ministry in a way to people who are not Christians they're not the ones who pay for it following Paul's model we're the ones to pay for that ministry through ministry in the high school through funerals weddings RE classes through the contacts that all of us on staff make day in day out really with people in our local community who come to us or we go to them who are unbelievers so funding in a sense more ministry even here at Holy Trinity is not an indulgent thing but is actually a gospel strategy in a couple of weeks time I think it is that CMS will have an envelope in our notice sheet for its annual Pentecost appeal every year it struggles to meet its budget

CMS funds the Reeds in the Middle East the Mitchells in Russia the Greys Glovers in Nepal for whom we have particular links and responsibilities fund a significant part of our church budget goes into missionary support of people like them and Andy Priddo and others but if we were more gospely generous then more Christians not just us CMS wouldn't be struggling financially and if they had more money there'd be more who could be trained and sent out as labourers into other places where the harvest is plentiful but the labourers few but it's promoting the gospel with money in other ways little ways we have an annual dinner in three weeks time the aim of which is to bring non-Christian friends to hear the gospel you paying for their tickets so that they can come for free is a simple and relatively cheap gospel strategy so that people who are not believers or people who've got doubts about the faith can hear something clear and straightforward about the faith and even if for some reason you can't come to the dinner it may be that you decide yes there's a gospel strategy

I'm prepared to pay for somebody else's friend who's not a Christian that they might come or it might be to pay for the food for example for an introducing God course where we actually ask people to donate some money towards the meal they get yes at one level we can say well if people have a meal well maybe they should pay but if the course is there for people who are not Christians what a generous thing to do is say this meal is totally free the church has paid for you so that you can hear the gospel unhindered and freely because the gospel after all is free grace from God to you and then as that seed is sown and people may become Christians through courses like that then they might take on the obligation so well as a result of the grace that I've received I'll I'll help pay for the next course around and so on and there's a whole range of things like that in our church life where we think if we can fund it better and give more generously for the sake of the gospel then more people will hear of Jesus Christ and his free love for them and come to faith here locally nationally internationally the harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few time and again in the New

[31 : 08] Testament Christians are urged into generous financial partnership for the gospel sake giving for people who who are not Christians who maybe they'll never meet this side of heaven in other places indeed there are more exhortations in the New Testament to give generously money for the gospel than there are to actually preach the gospel there are even more exhortations to pray for the ministry of the gospel and yet we look at our own budgets we think well how am I going to give more I'm fairly hard up I've always got an excuse not to give people got mortgages or they've got children or they've got elderly parents or they're preparing for their retirement or they're on fixed incomes or they've got a retirement home to prepare for or put aside money for this that or the other to be honest all of us could list a hundred excuses and we'll never give more and we'll never give more generously part of giving more generously is cutting back our expenses considering how much money we spend on junk and luxuries and indulgences for example

I think it was Charles Wesley the writer of the first hymn that we sang or maybe his brother John who worked out in one year in the 1700s his income was so many shillings a week expenditure so many shillings a week when he got a little bit more than that he kept his expenditure at the same level virtually for the rest of his life as best he could so that every increase he got in income was actually put into gospel ministry for the sake of others now we live in an inflationary society we may not be able to peg our income our expenditure exactly the level of today for the rest of our life but the challenge surely is there to take measures so that we can be even more generous for the harvest is plentiful but the labour is a few that the world is not he wants up to." thank you thank you thank you