

1 Corinthians 9

by John Nelson Darby

Paul's sermon emphasizes the importance of being free from human control and living a life that is pleasing to God, while also warning against the dangers of putting man under law after grace has come in.

Scripture: John 10:28, Romans 5:5, Romans 8:10, 1 Corinthians 9:18-23, Philippians 1:19, 2 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 3:14, 1 John 3:4, Revelation 22:14

Topics: "Ministry", "Accountability in Preaching"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on 1 Corinthians 9, emphasizing the nature of ministry and the responsibilities of preachers. He highlights Paul's refusal to exercise his rights as an apostle for the sake of the gospel, illustrating the importance of serving without seeking personal gain. Darby discusses the balance between being supported by the church and maintaining independence in ministry, stressing that preachers are ultimately accountable to God. He warns against the dangers of legalism and the necessity of living a life consistent with one's preaching to avoid being a 'castaway.' The sermon concludes with a call to uphold the integrity of the gospel while navigating the complexities of ministry.

Transcript

In verse 18 of this chapter we find the word "abuse" again; but the Greek means that I use outright for myself. It would not have been abusing his power in the gospel, but he did not use that power as something to which he had title of possession; he only thought about it as a thing he could use for the sake of the gospel. There is really no thought of "abusing" in it. It would not be "abusing," to take a salary, or whatever you call it. "Abuse" is a bad word, but it is difficult to give the sense in one word; no single English word suits. As to the other passage - "Using this world and not abusing it" - you hear it quoted by people who are up to their neck in it; and it is, perhaps, more important to notice it there than here. It is using this world as not having it in possession; simply handling it therefore, and that not as property.

235 The general subject here is ministry. False teachers had gone to Corinth, Judaising and seeking their own, and, by way of getting a great credit, took nothing. Paul, finding it out, would not take anything either; not that he had not the title. He was an apostle, and the Lord had so ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel; but he would not use the power. Whatever it was, Paul would not take it, and the assembly as an assembly has nothing to do with it; community and fellowship in the act is all very nice, yet if they do it together, it is not as an assembly, though in fellowship. If I go to preach and teach, it is as sent of the Lord, though, of course, it is always happy to do it in fellowship.

An assembly would be to blame if they knew an evangelist labouring, and did not assist him. They would be losing one of their privileges. The Philippians were very forward to do it, and so it was now with some. Perhaps it might be to help some other gift, and in another place. I think that is a most happy thing to find, and would not only have blessing on the one side, but on the other. Locality makes no difference. An evangelist is a servant of Christ, not of the assembly. In Philippians, "now at the last your care of me" is a beautiful expression of the delicacy of the feeling of the apostle; they had left him a long while, or he says so, and then adds, "but ye lacked opportunity." If things were right in an assembly, all this would be done happily. In many places there are collections at times for brothers at work at home and abroad, which is all very right too. I did not mean that the assembly should not together assist, but that it should not have a control of the preacher in any way; he is responsible to the Lord, and not the assembly's servant. On the other hand, if they knew any reason for not sending to him, they would be bound not to help him.

If a preacher gives up his trade for the Lord's sake, of course he may "live of the gospel" by being maintained and fed, getting food, raiment, and what he wanted. He may, if he have energy, work like Paul all night, and so support his house as to prevent selfish people, like some at Corinth, from saying, He is doing it for his pay. Not many have energy enough to do the two things, and do them well. If you have a man preaching, supply him while he preaches; he that ploughs should plough in the hope of getting the fruit of his ploughing; so Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2 that he must work, or else he will not get his wages. There is a question of translation whether it is "first labouring," or "first partaking." It is a mere comparison like the other; if a man strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned unless he strive lawfully. Only he must first labour to be a partaker. The verses before shew that he is to endure hardness as a good soldier, and he is not to entangle himself with the affairs of this life. We have something of the same kind in verse 24 of our chapter: "know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize?" Even what Christ has sent me, I do not take up, for His sake. I glory in this that I have given up everything I had a title too, for the gospel's sake. It is a very strong expression, Better for me to die than for me to do anything that would hinder the gospel. He was ashamed of the Corinthians.

236 Paul was not under yoke to anyone in his service, only to the Lord, of course. He was free in that sense; it is what he calls willingly and unwillingly in this chapter. He did it not for his own will, but still he was free from man. Peter did not send him. That was what they charged against him; he had not seen the apostle; he did not come from Jerusalem, and so on. In verse 19 we find what "free" is: "Though I be free from all, yet have I made myself servant unto all." In 2 Corinthians 11 he says no one shall stop him of his boasting, and he will do as he had done, that he might cut off occasion from others, "that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we."

In verses 20, 21, he sought to win Jews, not to Judaize. Judaizing was very common. In itself Judaism was God's dealing with human nature, to see if good could be got out of flesh. God dealt with Adam and then with the Jew (promise coming in between), but Judaism was God taking up man on his responsibility, and giving him a rule or law, and with it all appliances to help, a priesthood and temple, every kind of help to a man as man, to see if any good could be got from him. It was the orderly essaying and proving whether man could be on terms with God. He could not please God; but yet it is the constant tendency of human nature to go back and try again, for it does not bow and own; there is no good in it; and so it is always talking about keeping the law, but never does it. Really man's responsibility is not in question at all. There is such a thing; but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." But that is it which has been brought into the light and condemned, and I have therefore now a right to say I am dead. "Through the law I am dead to the law, that I might live

unto God." I am dead and finished as a child of Adam. Because this is not apprehended, there are always some remains of Judaism. "When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins which were by the law did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." And the result is, we discover we are lost. Take the whole system of setting up law in any form, and the moving of men's hearts by it: it all owns man still - alive in the flesh. You get it grossly in a self-righteous person, and in a mixed shape in those who try to put law and grace together; but in each and all it is just human nature thinking it can be something. There is something terrible in putting a man under law after grace has come in; it is setting him to responsibility after flesh has been proved unable to meet it.

237 After the second word "law" in verse 20, there is a clause left out, which is, "not being myself under law." It is recognised as in the text by all who have examined it. He puts subjection to Christ in the place of being under law. All that he means by "to them that are under the law, as under law," is some such thing as that he would not eat pork, if sitting at table with a Jew. Timothy was circumcised on some such principle. He had no right to be circumcised. It was an arbitrary act (for his father was a Greek), unless he wished himself to be a Jew. Paul yielded to the Jewish Christians in that case, and did it to please them; but notice that the moment he got into a scrape about it, not one of those he sought to please shewed his face to help him. In dealing with Jews he adapted himself to them, but directly that the Jews made the law necessary, he withstood them. He would not give in about Titus, because they were making it necessary. But here in Paul's own case there was no necessity; it was his own adapting himself to them, and just what we all ought to do. His action at Jerusalem was a further case. The Spirit had told him not to go up, and he could not do anything right there, though nothing wrong either. It was merely to please himself, and under other people's advice, doing this and that after he had left all such things entirely.

238 There is no limit for the early primitive church but the death of the apostles. Peter speaks of his decease, pointing to a change. But what we have in principle for ourselves is, "that which is from the beginning." If it is not from the beginning, it has no claim of authority at all. "If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father." They had wanted at the council of Nice to establish the celibacy of the clergy, but one old bishop got up and told them they would only be putting a snare to their feet; that was about nine years before some tried at the first so-called general council to lay it down as a rule, but they were hindered, though the spirit of asceticism had come in. A century afterwards you find the strongest denouncement of these notions. Chrysostom has two treatises against them.

Alford's translation is not to be depended upon. It may be useful to a person who can judge for himself. He had an active mind in raising questions, but I never regarded his judgment in settling them. His was not a sober judgment, and not therefore one to be trusted. What I dread in these new translations is that there is a kind of conservatism of an old doctrine governing them; as, for instance, Alford retains, "Sin is the transgression of the law," 1 John 3:4. Thus you find him keeping to the old thing because it is there. None of them knows scripture or has got truth from scripture, but they bring their thoughts to scripture. Some modern scholars have changed that text, and besides it is clear enough in other passages, as Romans 2:12, "they that have sinned without law, shall also perish without law"; which is in contrast with them that have sinned under law. It is clear contrast there and that in the English translation itself. But they had a doctrine which was that the transgression of the law was sin, and so in John they put it, "sin is the transgression of the law"; but where their doctrine was not in question, they translated it as "lawless." In John it is positively contrary to scripture; for when it says "they that have sinned without law," how can this be if sin is the transgression of the law? And again, how then could sin by the commandment become

exceedingly sinful? And again, "for until the law sin was in the world": how could that be if sin was but the transgression of the law?

239 "Sin is not imputed when there is no law," it is true. But this is not the word elsewhere rendered "impute"; it means the particular sin is not put to account. You are a sinner and lawless when you have no law, but I cannot say to you, Such and such a thing is forbidden. As if my child runs into the street, instead of doing its lessons, I cannot say in a particular sense, "You have been disobedient"; but if I have told him not to go out into the street, then it is not a general question of his idleness, but I say I am going to whip you for that particular thing. In Romans 5:13, what the apostle is reasoning on is that death was a proof that sin was there before there was law. You cannot confine grace to the Jews, for then you make it narrower than sin; for death and sin were there, and all had sinned, and if you shut up grace to those under law and do not let in the Gentiles, you are making sin a more powerful thing than the grace of God. Death was reigning there before ever Moses' law came in, and that is the meaning of the expression "who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," a quotation from Hosea 6:7, "but they like men" - Adam - "have transgressed the covenant." These Gentiles never did that, the Jews did. They transgressed it, and Adam too transgressed the commandment he had; yet these Gentiles were under sin and death, though they had no law at all. You must now take up Christ as answering to Adam in headship, though first he adds more, that the law entered that the offence might abound, but where sin - not offence - abounded, grace did much more abound. The difference between "impute" in Romans 4 and 5, is that in chapter 4 it is reckoning a man to be something; in chapter 5 it is putting so much to his account. It occurs again in Philemon, "put that to my account."

In reading the verse in 1 John 3, "Sin is lawlessness," it would not have the same effect if you reversed the words as they stand as in our version; but as in the Greek with the two articles, it is a reciprocal proposition. 'A blow is sin'; but you could not say, 'sin is a blow.' But 'lawlessness is sin and 'sin is lawlessness'; and he who practises sin also practises lawlessness. It is kai (and) that is used to connect the sentence, which I think brings it back to an abstract proposition. In Romans 5:5, Adam had a law and Moses had a law, and sin was in between and death too. I think you see at once that a law is in contemplation; not so lawlessness, which is expressed by an abstract word.

240 Sin, I believe, is a man having a will of his own. It so far takes in law that, the moment you have got a creature of God, there was some rule or will of God that that creature ought to obey, but if he does not, he is lawless. To sin, in Greek, is to err, to miss anything, as, not to hit when shooting at a mark, or to reel off when you ought to keep on; to leave a straight right path is the etymological meaning of this word. But it is a very different thing to bring in the thought of law. If I say, "them that have sinned without law," it makes me think of a law though they have had none. You cannot in the abstract sense think of a creature that has to say to God, without thinking of God's authority expressed somehow, and this would be a law to him, which also was true in the garden of Eden. But when a fruit was particularly forbidden, it was a legal covenant; "if you eat that, you shall die" - a positive rule. Well man eats it and gets a conscience, and so on. Afterwards Moses' law was a perfect rule for man in that state, for a child of Adam that had got away from God. There is no means in it of bringing him back to God, and therefore it says, "the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be": it has got a will of its own. That state we have brought out in our chapter where we were reading, in which Paul is said to be under law to Christ, and yet not himself under law. It is the abstract idea of being subject to the rule of Christ, and so on; yet he states at the same time that he is not under law, he will not hear of that in any way: but he adds "not without law to God," nor lawless therefore as regards God, and yet he is not under law, while he is rightly subject to

Christ.

The mischief of maintaining law is that it sets up flesh, treating man as alive. Now the doctrine of Christianity is that man is not alive. The law has power over a man so long as he lives. Well, if I am alive, I am a responsible man in the flesh, and lost and condemned. But now we are delivered from the law, having died in that in which we were held, and that is where there is no allowance of sin; and he brings in a nature to which the power of Christ is added. He does not set about to leave the man alive and then bring the law to a man that will not bow to it. He did that once of old, but now in Christ we have a new life with power in it, and in that respect the Christian scheme is as plain as possible. It is not bringing a law to a nature that cannot be subject to it, but the bringing in a new nature that delights to do the will of God. You contrast the new nature with will, and then add the Holy Ghost for power.

241 In Romans 8:10, "the body is dead because of sin." If my body is alive, in the scriptural sense of evil, it is flesh, but of course this body is a mere instrument. The Jesuits said a body ought to be a mere carcase and obey. "On account of sin" is the practice. The only source of life to the Christian that he owns is the Spirit. I hold my body dead, because if it is alive it will be a fountain of sin. Sin in the flesh is clear in scripture. You never get flesh alone unless merely as to the body, as "the life I live in the flesh." The "body of sin," in Romans, is taking it as a whole: as I might say the "body of heaven," the whole of it. In Colossians it is "body of the flesh": it is the idea of the whole thing going as one lump. I do not doubt there is an allusion to the body, but the thought is the whole thing. This body is looked at as the seat of sin, I have no doubt.

We get the two parts of the thing from being dead with Christ, dead and alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Then follows "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." In the Spirit of life I get power. Then comes the other side: "God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." The law could not do this; it might curse, but it could get nothing good out of me. Where I was, Christ came there to die, and there and then God condemned sin in the flesh. Christ was made sin for me, and that which was tormenting my mind God has condemned altogether, and there is an end of it for faith.

It is like "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," only this goes farther. First, as to sins, the Lord bore them and put them away; then I find there is a tree of evil in me, what of that? It is all condemned upon the cross where Christ died, and you are consequently to reckon yourselves dead. I have done with it - sin in the flesh: that is, faith has. I know it is more difficult for us to lay hold of that, than to lay hold of the forgiveness of sins, because it contradicts our experience. If a man comes and tells me my debts are all paid, I believe that; but if he said, "You are dead to sin," I say, "How do you mean that; for I was in a passion this morning?" and in this way experience contradicts it. But it did die in Christ's death; it is all dead and gone, because I am in Christ, and Christ is my life. And when the flesh comes and shews its face to me, I say, You have had your day, and have been ended. I have a right to say this, knowing that Christ has died, and God condemned sin in the flesh there. I have a perfect title to do so, and also I have Christ as my power. Being a partaker, in verse 23, is the joy of seeing souls saved, and being saved himself.

242 Now we come to one of those verses people are afraid of looking in the face. "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection, lest, that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway," v. 26, 27. The word "castaway" troubles some. People have tried to make out that a castaway is not a

castaway. I see no difficulty in it at all. The apostle supposes a case: one is preaching to others, and perishes himself. Paul was perfectly well assured as to himself; but he says if he had been merely preaching, he would have been falsely assured; but if not merely beating the air, he was rightly assured.

The running to "obtain" is the general idea of the incorruptible crown of glory. He has salvation in his mind: "that I might be all means save some," and so on. He is not thinking only of the reward of service, but he takes it all here in the most general way. Scripture is plain enough: "Every man shall receive reward according to his own labour." "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brother, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting." There is that which characterises the faith of the Christian, and makes eternal life the reward. There is the keeping of the body down, that is, the contrary to preaching. I am not merely a preacher, but a liver, "lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." You must run lawfully, as a Christian, not merely preach; or you may have all the sacraments, as they are called, and yet fall in the wilderness. There must be reality, whatever else there is.

243 Those who weaken the force of the word "castaway" do so right in the teeth of the passage. It has no reference to the quality of the preaching, for the apostle says, "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air, but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." "I myself," is not my service, nor my preaching. To be a castaway is to be lost - to be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." What Paul means is, he is not only a believer, but is living like a believer, or he might be cast away as well as other people. I have not the most distant doubt that God will keep His people; they shall never perish. But suppose I say, "If such a person stayed in such a room, he will never have consumption." So if Paul himself had been preaching only, not living, he would have been a castaway; but he was not that, and he was stating how he was living that he might not be a castaway. The point is, that you must strive lawfully and according to the rules. Now the rule of Christ is, you must live as well as talk, or else be afraid of the consequences. "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die."

In Revelation 22:14 we read "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life." But I have no doubt it should be read, "Blessed are they that wash their robes," etc. I believe the book of life is final, and all the devils cannot blot a name out of it. Where it speaks of blotting out, it is like a registry of votes. If it is proved that a certain name has no right there, it is blotted out. Every professor's name is in the book of life: but if God wrote it, it will never be blotted out. A mere professor writes his name himself, but he has no right to be there, unless God has written his name, and it will be blotted out. In Revelation 22:19 it should be "tree of life," not "book of life." God takes away no name that He has written. In chapter 13:8, it should be, I doubt not, "written from the foundation of the world," and not "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"; and such a name will not be blotted out. I suppose the book of life (chap. 20) is after the names are blotted out, for verse 15 is "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Although they are there judged for their works, their names were not in the book. Blotting out is, because a man's name was there that had no right to be there. Moses had the same thought. He says, "blot me out."

244 "Life," and "living" in scripture, when God uses it, is not always the thought of mere life; as "Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee." It is divine favour also. This is one of those cases in which I do not see that those who make difficulties have in the least gained anything. I do not think that the idea of blotting out is all; there is the reality. God puts absolute principles, which lead to certain consequences, and if a cap fits, let a man wear it. People try to torture passages to make them consistent with doctrines, instead of taking the doctrine from the passages. Take "if ye live after the flesh ye shall die"; I am not going to

weaken that. Again, "to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and incorruptibility, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." Then, says some one, a man is saved by his works; eternal life is dependent on patient continuance, etc. It is practical Christianity brought in at once. I resist altogether the attempts to enfeeble that pressure on the conscience which I see in scripture. "Work out your own salvation" is not temporal salvation; it is in contrast with Paul's working, as he might say: I was labouring for your salvation when I was with you, and now you must do it for yourselves, because I am here in prison; but you have not lost God by losing me: "God is working in you both to will and to do." You torture the scripture otherwise. In Philippians, salvation is always looked at as with glory at the end. It was not the mere salvation of Paul's body in chapter 1:19. We always have that truth in that epistle founded on redemption. The cross has laid hold of me for the glory, but I have not yet laid hold of it, and what I ought to apprehend is that for which I have been apprehended. And God's way was when He laid hold of Paul to put him through the wilderness, and make him work out his salvation to the end. When I say God is keeping His people, I ask too, Why has He to keep them? Because they want keeping or they would fall.

245 You have the two things in John 10: "They shall never perish," inwardly, nor be "plucked out of my hand." But this is not to weaken the plain positive passages which are given as warning, and meant to be as warning. We have the "ifs" in Hebrews, and in Colossians 1, "if ye continue," and so on. Now I suppose I believe that God is keeping His saints, and still I say to you, "If you continue to the end you will be saved." A methodist thinks and will say the same, but he thinks such an one might be lost after all; while I am perfectly certain that he will never perish, that is, if he really has life at all.

Different states of soul need different treatment. We must give meat in due season. A passage which might help on one, might puff up another; that is a question of spiritual wisdom in dealing with souls. All that I feel anxious about is the maintenance of the positive dealing of scripture with conscience. Take that passage in Romans we referred to: "Who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who, by patient continuance," etc. Well, a man says, There may then be good people, and if they work good, they will get glory, and honour, and peace. But I say to him, "You are wrong entirely; there is none good but God." There is plenty of scripture to meet such a case, but we need not weaken this sentence in Romans in order to do it. It is the necessity of God's nature, that there must be a certain life and character in a man for him to be with God. We have a scripture that God has given that nature, and that He will keep it to the end; but the latter does not enfeeble the fact that the nature is such as it is. You must have that life and walk in that life, or you will not be in heaven. Thus we have broad dealing with conscience, and that is what we must not weaken. We have it plain enough in scripture, unmitigated and unenfeebled. Consciences want it, they are slippery enough. If I use it to weaken a person's faith in God's fidelity, I use it wrongly; but I want to give it all its force as it stands, while giving meat in due season. Suppose I found a person slipping into sin, and I say to him, "Well, never mind, God is faithful"; though that is abstractly true, it is not what I should use to him then, but just the opposite. Yet if God did not keep me, I know I should be soon slipping off somewhere.

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