

(1 Corinthians) ch.9:1-9:23

by Zac Poonen

Paul defends his apostleship and establishes the principle that the laborer is worthy of his reward, and that those who serve the Lord have every right to be supported by those whom they serve in the name of Jesus Christ.

Duration: 43:52

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

Topics: "Self Denial", "Servant Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on 1 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 1. The apostle Paul is being questioned about his apostleship and he defends himself by highlighting his encounters with Jesus and his adherence to the word of God. The speaker emphasizes that a true servant of God denies themselves of their legitimate rights in order to serve others, using Paul as an example. Paul gave up his rights to financial support, food and drink, and even marriage in order to be an example and expose false preachers. The sermon challenges listeners to follow Paul's example and deny themselves for the sake of serving God and others.

Transcript

We turn today to 1 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 1. Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work 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. In the previous chapters, Paul had been answering a number of questions that the Corinthian Christians had written to him and he had clarified their doubts concerning marriage, concerning eating things sacrificed to idols and many other matters like that.

Now here he is dealing with a problem that was peculiar to the church in Corinth. It surprises us today, but it was a fact that many people in the church in Corinth questioned whether Paul was really an apostle of Jesus Christ or not, particularly because he had never met the Lord when Jesus was alive on the earth. They probably had no question about Peter and John and some of the others, but when it came to Paul who had been called after Jesus had ascended up into heaven, there was a question in their mind as to whether he had the same authority as the other eleven who had been with Jesus when he was on earth.

And he is answering that question here. It was probably not written down and asked of Paul, but Paul realized that they had a question like this in their minds and so he defends his apostleship. He says am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Paul had seen Jesus on the Damascus road when he was converted.

And he says if there is no other proof of my apostleship, the fact that you yourself were converted through my ministry is the proof of my apostleship. Are you not my work 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. And that teaches us that one mark of an apostle's ministry is that there is fruit in terms of churches established when none were existing before.

Before Paul came to Corinth, there were no Christians there, there was no church there. When Paul came as a result of his ministry, there were Christians and there was a church. And that is part of the ministry of an apostle.

The word apostle means a sent one. One who is specifically sent by the Lord directly with a particular commission to fulfill. And it was the Lord Jesus who had sent Paul to Corinth and Paul fulfilled that commission by establishing a local church in Corinth.

And this is what he means when he says, even if I am not an apostle to others, I am still an apostle to you because you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. We read in Ephesians 4 verse 11 that Jesus Christ after he has ascended up on high, he has given gifts to the church. And among those gifts, five are mentioned there and the first of the five is apostles.

And then prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. And those are gifts that the Lord has given to the church after his ascension. Which proves that there are apostles that Jesus gives to the church even after he has gone up to heaven.

Which would mean that he gives apostles to the church even today in the 20th century. And one mark of such an apostle would be the establishing of local churches. And an apostle would be an elder brother to the local elders of a church.

And this is what Paul is trying to prove to the Corinthians, particularly to those who doubted whether he was an apostle or not. Now we must recognize here that Paul was not doing this as a matter of prestige or any such matter at all. He was speaking to them, proving his apostleship mainly for one reason and only one.

And that was that he wanted them to accept what he wrote to them as the word of the Lord. That comes out later in 1 Corinthians 14 where he says, If any of you think he is spiritual, let him recognize that what I am writing to you is the commandment of the Lord. The apostles had that authority to write scripture like no one else had.

And Paul wanted the Corinthians to recognize that authority in him so that they would accept his letters not merely as good suggestions, but as the word of the Lord to them. Now, living 19 centuries after those events, we can wonder how anybody could question the apostleship of Paul when we see so many of his writings in the New Testament. But it was a fact in that time, and Paul had to establish and prove his apostleship in order to have his letters accepted with the same authority as that of the other apostles.

And he goes on in verse 3 to say, My defense to those who examine me is this, which means there were people who though carnal, remember the Corinthian Christians were carnal and babies, though they were carnal, they had the audacity to question the apostleship of this great man of God. There were people who were seeking to examine him. One is surprised at the audacity of these carnal Christians, and you find that same audacity in carnal Christians today who would seek to be critical and judgmental of servants of God

whom God has used mightily.

It's always a carnal Christian who seeks to examine a mightily used servant of God. And here is an example in the Corinthian Christians. My defense to those who examine me is this.

And he speaks about the rights that we have as human beings. Don't we have a right to eat and drink? Sure, all human beings have that right. We need to understand the point to which Paul is driving.

He is seeking to prove that even though he had many rights, he gave them all up in order to be an apostle to these Corinthian Christians. And that is what he primarily seeks to present as the proof of his apostleship. Now, it's a mark of his great humility that he did not seek to tell them about all the miracles he had done, about the people he had raised from the dead, or the sicknesses he had healed, or any of the other fantastic experiences he had in terms of visions and being lifted up to the third heaven, etc., as the proof of his apostleship.

Rather, he speaks of his character. And it is character that identifies Paul as an apostle, not gifts. There are many who will come to the Lord in the final day and say, Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name, we cast out demons in your name, we did miracles in your name.

And they did, certainly, do those things. But yet the Lord rejects them because there was no character in their life. And so when Paul seeks to prove his apostleship, he does not speak about miracles, he does not speak about the number of churches he has established, but rather he speaks about character.

And he says, don't we have a right to eat and drink? Don't we have a right to be married like all the other apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas, verse 5? Or don't Barnabas and I, Barnabas was his co-worker, don't we have a right to refrain from working so that you and other Christians can support us? Certainly, Paul had a right to these. And as I said earlier, he is driving at this point, all these rights he gave up. He denied himself food and drink in order to serve God's people.

He denied himself the privilege of married life in order to be more available for God and for his people. He denied himself the right to be financially supported by God's people in order to be an example, in order to expose the false apostles. And there we see an example in Paul which challenges us even today.

And as we look at verse 5, we see something which is commonly misunderstood today, and that is that apart from Paul, it appears as though verse 5 tells us that all the other apostles were married. Now there is a teaching that is found in certain Christian circles even today, that if you are married, you cannot be an apostle. This is a false teaching, because it says here in verse 5 that all the other apostles were married, and the brothers, the physical brothers of Jesus Christ were also married, and Peter himself was married.

So there is no disqualification in marriage to prevent you from any ministry, not even the ministry of an apostle in the church of Jesus Christ. Paul was saying that for your sake I have denied these things, I have given up these things. And further he says in verse 7, who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Nobody does that.

Even the mercenaries, when they fight for a country, they expect payment. And even the most patriotic soldier in any army is paid and receives payment. Nobody serves as a soldier at his own expense.

Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Surely if a man plants a vineyard, he can eat the fruit of his own vineyard, or if a man tends a flock, he can drink the milk of that flock, certainly. But Paul

says, to be an example to you and to expose the false preachers who are roaming around in Corinth and other places, I have denied myself these rights. And he says, I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? He says, I am not just using human illustrations.

What about the word of God? The word of God also says, verse 9, that you must not muzzle the ox while he is threshing. The one who labors is worthy of his hire. And there we see an example in the Apostle Paul, that though he had these rights, he denied himself of these rights in order to serve others.

And let's remember, this is the number one mark of a true servant of God, that he denies himself his legitimate rights in order to serve others. We turn now to 1 Corinthians and chapter 9 and verse 8. In our last study we were considering how Paul proves his apostleship to the Christians in Corinth by showing how he denied himself his legitimate rights as a servant of God and as an apostle. And thus establishes the fact that he is indeed truly an apostle and a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He uses the illustration of a soldier, saying a soldier, even though he fights for his country, is paid for it. And a farmer who plants a vineyard can certainly eat the fruit of his own vineyard. And a shepherd who tends a flock can certainly drink the milk of his own flock, verse 7. And he says if these people can get the benefit of their service, why not we as apostles who are doing a far greater ministry than any soldier or farmer or shepherd? But he had denied himself these rights.

Some of the rights he denied himself was the right to eat and drink, verse 4, that is to be a guest at the expense of the churches in the homes of the different believers. Paul had a right as a servant of God to be a guest and to eat and drink in the homes of other believers free of cost. But he would not use it.

We read in 2 Thessalonians 3 that he never ate food anywhere without paying for it. 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 8. He was very careful to ensure that no one would have anything to accuse him of as one who was living off other people at the expense of others. He had denied himself the right to be married in order to devote more time to be available for the Lord and for the building of his church.

And he had denied himself the right to receive financial support and was working with his own hands so that he would not be a burden to anyone. And he says these illustrations that I've used, verse 8, you can say they are human arguments. But it's not just human arguments, he says.

Even in God's word, the principle of support for the worker is established. Verse 9 he says, in the law of Moses, and he's quoting there from the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 25, verse 4, that God had commanded that the ox who's threshing out the corn must not be muzzled. Allow the ox to eat of the corn.

And he says, is it just for oxen that God has laid down that law? Do you think God was so concerned about oxen? Or do you think, verse 10, he was speaking about us? Certainly he was speaking about us. There's no doubt that we who are servants of God are also included if oxen are mentioned in the Old Testament. Verse 10, and then he goes on to say, the ploughman needs to plough in hope, and he who threshes should have some hope of an ultimate share in the harvest.

There's nothing wrong in that, is there? And verse 11, if we have sown the seed of spiritual things in your life, is it too much to reap some of the material benefits? Is it too great for us to reap material support from you as part of the harvest? No, there's nothing wrong in that. And he further establishes his point by argument and by scripture. And he says in verse 12, if there are other preachers who use these rites over you, don't we have a stronger claim because you were converted through us? Earlier on he had said in

chapter 4 that others may be your teachers, but I'm your father.

There was no church in Corinth until I came there, Paul says. Don't we have a right over you? We have it much more than all these other people. And having established step by step by human argument, by scripture, and by the fact that he had established that church there, his absolute right to be financially supported by the church in Corinth, and to come to the homes of the believers in Corinth, and to eat and drink at their expense.

Having established that right, he concludes by saying in the middle of verse 12, nevertheless, we have not used this right. This is what he was driving at. He says, I have not used this privilege.

I have given up every right. We endure all things. We are willing to suffer everything, lest we put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

Now that's a very important verse, verse 12. It speaks about putting a hindrance, something that would hinder the progress of the gospel of Christ. And you know very well that he's speaking there about money and financial support.

And we see here a very important principle. That a wrong attitude to financial support in the Lord's work can put a hindrance to the progress of the gospel, can hinder our testimony before others when we preach the gospel to them. And what a great need there is for this word to be spoken and proclaimed in our land in this time and in this day.

A wrong attitude to money and a wrong attitude to the Christian worker being supported financially by others can put a hindrance, a stumbling block in the way of the gospel of Christ. And that's why it's very, very important that we have an upright and righteous attitude to mammon, particularly if we are engaged in any form of Christian work. The word is very strong.

We did not use this right. And because we did not use this right, Paul says, life was not very comfortable for us. We had to endure many things.

We endured all things. And when you come to 2 Corinthians chapter 11, you see some of the things that he endured. Hardship, not enough to eat, not enough clothes to wear.

He went through all these things in order that he might not hinder the gospel of Christ. And there we have a unique example in the Apostle Paul. No wonder a little later in chapter 11, he could say, be imitators of me as I also am of Christ.

And particularly in this area, he would say, be an imitator of me. Be willing to give up your rights in order to serve other people if you want to be a true servant of God. Don't insist on your rights.

Don't force other people to recognize your rights. Give it up and the Lord will take care of you. Seek his kingdom first and his righteousness and all the other things will be added unto you.

And Paul was a living demonstration of that fact. That there might be no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. He further reinforces his argument, again by reference to the Old Testament.

In verse 13 he says, Don't you know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple? In the Old Testament, God had established the law that the Levites, the priests, could eat some of the sacrifices that were brought by the people. That was their food. And they had every right to take part of

those sacrifices for their own family's living needs.

There was nothing wrong in that. God had established it as a law through Moses. And further he says, emphasizing that point again in the last part of verse 13, that those who attend regularly to the altar have a share in the sacrificial offerings.

They get their daily bread from the temple. They get their food from the offerings that were put on the altar. He says in exactly the same way, in the New Testament, the Lord has directed, this is a principle that the Lord himself has commanded, that those who preach the gospel should get their living from the gospel.

Those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. And there is nothing wrong with that when the Lord himself has established it. But, again he says, even though I have this right, the right established from human argument, from the Old Testament scriptures, and by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, when he said, the laborer is worthy of his hire, yet he says in verse 15, I have used none of these things.

Notice the pains Paul takes to establish the fact that even though looking at it from every angle, he had the right to be financially supported, yet he refused to take any financial support. And there we have a unique example for all Christian workers today. And there are very few really who can say that they are imitating Paul in this area.

Would you continue to serve the Lord where you are serving him if you do not receive any money? Paul would. Paul's burden to serve the Lord did not arise because somebody paid him. No, whether people paid him or didn't pay him, he would continue to do what the Lord had burdened him to do.

He had a calling. God spoke to him and he knew what his calling was, and money made absolutely no difference whether people gave him gifts or didn't give him, it made absolutely no difference. And that's how it must be, dear friends, as we seek to serve the Lord too, that whether people support us or don't support us, whether we get money or don't get money, whether we have abundance or nothing, that we will serve the Lord in that which he has called us to.

He says I've used none of these things and he says I'm not writing these things as a hint now so that you can start supporting me. No, he says in verse 15, I would rather die than let anyone deprive me of this source of my pride and my boasting that I preach the gospel without charging anyone for it. And there we find the reason why Paul had such authority in his ministry.

The one who denies himself his rights is the one who has authority in his life. We turn today to 1 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 15. We were considering last week about the fact that Paul as an apostle used none of his rights as an apostle.

He did not impose himself upon the Corinthians in any way and in that respect he is a unique example for all servants of God today. He had a right to be financially supported but he gave up that right. And this is what he is expanding on in this passage and also in the following verses.

He says the Lord himself, verse 14, has directed that the man who preaches the gospel can be supported by those who hear him preach. Those to whom he ministers spiritual things should support him financially and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. That is a principle that the Lord has directed and it is applicable even in the 20th century today that those who serve the Lord have every right by the principle established by the Lord that the laborer is worthy of his reward to be supported by those whom they serve

in the name of Jesus Christ if they are faithful to their calling.

But Paul realized that in his case things were special and he wanted to be an example in 2 Corinthians and chapter 11 he gives us the reason why he did not receive financial support from the Corinthian Christians. Though he speaks about the fact in 1 Corinthians 9 he does not give us the reason here in 1 Corinthians 9 but in 2 Corinthians 11 and verse 12 he tells us the reason why I do not receive financial support from you is this that by my refusing financial support I have the opportunity to expose the false preachers who will not serve without being paid. There are people he says in 2 Corinthians 11-12 who say that they are also serving the Lord in the same way as Paul was and Paul challenges them and says alright let me see you serving God like I do let me see you serving God without being financially supported and thereby he says I expose the false apostles and the deceitful workers 2 Corinthians 11-13 who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ and there were many like that then there are many like that today and so we see that money is a great tester of a servant of God you can find out a true servant of God by his attitude to money.

Paul was at times financially supported by the church in Philippi for example he says that in 2 Corinthians 11 and also in Philippians 4 so Paul was not against receiving support but where he felt that receiving financial support would be a hindrance to the gospel or where it was necessary to forego that right in order to expose the false apostles Paul did that in other words Paul did not think that this was a right that he had every right to claim wherever he went no he lived according to the witness of the spirit according to the circumstances in which he found himself and in most cases we know that in Corinth in Ephesus and in Thessalonica where he spent a good deal of time in these three places he did not receive any support we read that in Acts 20 and 2 Thessalonians 3 and 1

Corinthians 9 that he did not receive any financial support in these places he gave up his right primarily with the reason of exposing false preachers and so we see that Paul was a true servant of God because his attitude to money was right he would be an apostle whether he was paid or not he would continue to preach the gospel whether he got money or not and that is the test of whether a man has a calling from God or whether a man is doing a task merely because some Christian organization pays him a salary and he says in verse 15 I have used none of these things and he says I am not writing these things now that you should now start supporting me because I am not interested in that I am not trying to give you hints Paul says there are many who write prayer letters and hint for support

but Paul would not be found in that category he says I would rather die than let any man deprive me of this opportunity to boast and to stand for a particular principle which the Lord has called me to live by and then he goes on to say the reason why he preached the gospel and this is a very interesting passage that is worthy of careful study because we see here the motivation for Paul's preaching the gospel he did not preach the gospel because he heard of a great need among the heathen that's how many people go out to preach the gospel today no that's not the main reason why Paul preached the gospel there was a need but that was secondary we see the primary reason here Jesus came to earth not because there was a need on earth primarily but primarily because his father told him to do that

he came from heaven to do his father's will and Paul was an imitator of Christ and therefore he preached the gospel with the same motivation and for the same reason and with the same principle he says if I preach the gospel verse 16 of 1 Corinthians 9 I've got nothing to boast I can't say well I'm such a great servant of God because I'm preaching the gospel no he says he says I'm under compulsion there is a necessity that compels me to do it I'm compelled by my master to preach the gospel and he goes on to

say woe unto me or as it's translated in another translation a curse is on me if I do not preach the gospel think of that Paul preached the gospel not because there was a need but because there was an inner compulsion that was given to him by the Holy Spirit which had nothing to do with

external need nothing to do with whether people paid him or didn't pay him an inner urge that the Holy Spirit had put into him when he was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit that urged him to go forth and present the gospel to others and he goes on to say in verse 17 if I do this voluntarily I have a reward or another paraphrase says if this service were of my own free choice I might claim wages to reward my labor if I were a volunteer there are people who think they can volunteer to serve the Lord Paul says if I had volunteered to the Lord and said Lord here am I I'm available I volunteer for your work and the Lord says alright I appoint you then then the Lord has the responsibility to pay such a person for the work which that person has volunteered to do but Paul says I'm not a

volunteer I'm not a volunteer at all I'm a slave I have been given a stewardship he says in verse 18 verse 17 and it's not a question of my will whether I feel like it or don't feel like it if against my will in other words supposing one day I don't feel like preaching the gospel or serving the Lord he says it makes no difference I still have to preach the gospel because it's not a question of feeling there is a stewardship a responsibility that has been committed to me a commission that I have been given as a slave he was not a volunteer he was a slave and what the Lord needs today in his vineyard all over the world is our slaves not volunteers volunteers pull out when the going gets tough when they don't get paid when life becomes difficult or when there is too much opposition but

slaves will stick at it whether they are paid or not paid whether the going is rough or easy whether there is opposition or blessing and approval makes no difference and that was how Paul served the Lord he knew that he had to do it whether he felt like it or not whether it was convenient or not whether he was paid or not whether people appreciated it or not whether people misunderstood him or accepted him whether they honored him or dishonored him it made absolutely no difference he was a slave he was not a volunteer and therefore he could not expect a pay a volunteer can expect to be paid but he says I am not a volunteer I am a slave and in those days slaves were people who were purchased by their masters slaves did not get a monthly salary a slave is different from a servant a servant

gets a monthly salary what the Lord is looking for is not servants but slaves and he says I am a slave I serve the Lord whether the Lord supports me or not and that was the right attitude and that's why his ministry was so effective of course the Lord does take care of his slaves and provide all their needs that's another matter Jesus told Peter and the other apostles that if you've given up houses and lands and mothers and fathers and so many things for my sake and the Gospels you will get all that you need a hundred fold here on this earth with persecutions and in the end eternal life so the Lord does take care of his slaves there's no doubt about that but it's important that from our side we do not look for reward either here on this earth or in eternity we are here with only one aim

to please our master then he says in verse 18 if that's the case what is my reward? what is my pay? since I'm not receiving a pay from you people for preaching to you here is my pay my pay is the satisfaction that I get through being able to present the Gospel to other people free of cost I can go to people and say brothers and sisters you don't have to pay me for preaching to you I come and serve you and you don't have to support me and he says that is my pay that people can be blessed without having to pay for it and then I do not use my right in the Gospel as an evangelist and oh that there were more of such servants of God throughout the world today we turn today to 1 Corinthians in chapter 9 and verse 19 in the previous

verses we have been considering in the last few weeks how Paul

had given up his rights as an apostle to be financially supported he had also given up the right as a human being to be married in order to be more available to preach the Gospel to have more time for the Lord's work and ministry he had not eaten and drunk verse 4 at the expense of other believers he had paid for everything even though he had a right to receive these free of charge and in this connection he continues here in verse 19 to say though I am free from all men I have made myself a slave to all as a result of all his giving up of his rights in every way he was free he did not have any obligation to obey anyone because he was not paid as the living Bible paraphrases verse 19 I am not bound to obey anyone because no one pays my salary when somebody pays your salary you have to obey

him even if the Lord calls you to do something else but Paul was not obligated to obey anyone because he did not receive financial support from anyone therefore he could speak the truth many a pastor cannot speak the truth to his congregation because he is afraid lest they stop supporting him and even when the Lord speaks to him to say something to the congregation according to their need he may hesitate for this fear that his salary may be cut or taken away altogether but Paul did not have any such fear so he could speak straight as a prophet of the Lord and it's very important if God calls anyone to be his mouthpiece as a prophet or a preacher or a proclaimer of the truth that no one should be able to bind your mouth and money has a tremendous power to shut and bind the mouths of God's

servants and if you are a servant of God called to proclaim the truth of God my friend just make sure that mammon doesn't tie your mouth in any way that you are free like Paul was free from all men whether you are supported or not supported is secondary the main thing is we have to be free of people if I seek to please men Paul said in Galatians 1.10 I cannot be the servant of Christ that is impossible no human being can be the servant of Christ if he seeks to please men and it is because of the power of money that many preachers do try to please men they can preach in such a way that they do not offend people they can preach in such a way that they will be invited back because they did not offend anyone and these are dangers that stand in the way of a true servant of God we are to

proclaim the truth seeking only God's approval and in order to do that we have to be completely free in every way from all human beings and that's what Paul is speaking of here in verse 19 I am free from the authority of all men he says no one has any claim on me I have made myself a slave to all now the danger is that when we do become free we can think then I don't have to bother about serving others no quite the opposite and here is the balance that though he was free from all men he made himself a servant to all men any true servant of Jesus Christ must be a servant of all men a servant of God has got no right to behave like a lord and a master it's a great tragedy when a servant of God behaves like a master or like a big shot in the world Jesus was not a big shot in the world he

lived as the servant of all men and if we are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ we will be servants of all men we will not consider ourselves as superior to any other believers we will not look down upon other believers whether they are young or old it's a great tragedy when a servant of God moves around like a political big shot that is not a true representation of Christ no that is far from it and Paul was not like that he made himself a servant because he was free financially from all people he could make himself a true servant of all people and the aim was that he might win them and that is also the aim of a true servant of God of winning as many people as possible not to his denomination but to Jesus Christ and that is the mark of a true servant of God that he does not seek to attach

people to himself or to his group but to Christ the head to build the body and he says that in order to win as many people as possible I have done two things one I have made myself free from all of people and I have made myself a slave to all people it is only thus that we can effectively win people in a lasting way and then he goes on to expand on that and says specifically what he did he says when I am in the midst of the Jews I became as a Jew that I might win the Jews that does not mean that he started following the Jewish customs no but he adapted himself as far as possible without compromising to the Jewish way of life in order to win the Jews to Christ and to those who are under the law as under the law even though he says I myself am not under the law that I might win those who

are under the law he says I was willing to take the position in their eyes as one who is under the law inwardly I am free but I was willing to adapt myself to their position in order to win them in order to bring them out of bondage to the law and then he says when I am in the midst of the Gentiles for example verse 21 those who are without any law who don't have any written law then I am one just like them or as the living Bible paraphrases that when I am with the heathen I agree with them as much as I can but at no point would he compromise the gospel he says though I am not being without the law of God for I am under the law of Christ there is a law in the New Testament not the law of Moses it's described here in verse 21 as the law of Christ the law of obedience to God's commandments

the law of loving one another including one's enemies he recognized that law he was submitted to that law as a true Christian but he was willing to agree as far as possible so that he might open a channel into the hearts of people to win them to Christ so the point of these verses is not that Paul was a compromiser some people misunderstand this as though Paul kept quiet on certain doctrines he never did wherever he went we read in Acts chapter 20 that he proclaimed the whole council of God Acts 20 verse 27 wherever Paul went he proclaimed the whole council of God he didn't keep quiet on certain doctrines in order to get a wider acceptance for that would have been bowing the knee to Satan that is the temptation that comes to preachers even today to keep quiet on certain doctrines in order

to get a wider acceptance and they can misuse these verses to justify their position Paul is not saying here that he was a compromiser no he would proclaim the whole council of God he would not hold back anything that was profitable for people but in external things and this is referring only to external things he was willing to adapt himself to their manner of speech and their way of life and to their external customs provided it didn't involve violation of scriptural principles and in every way possible as far as he could go without compromising the truth of the gospel he was willing to be like others in order to save them verse 22 he says to the weak I became weak to the weak he is referring to those who are weak in faith or as another translation says to the over scrupulous I have

been willing to adapt myself to their level they are over scrupulous about certain things for example he says about eating meat he said that in chapter 8 verse 13 that if eating meat offered to idols causes my brother to stumble I won't eat meat even though he says I am free from that it doesn't disturb me to eat meat offered to idols but if that disturbs my brother or it disturbs someone else he says I am willing to forego that in order to win him to Christ or as he said in Romans 14 the kingdom of God is not meat and drink I am not going to destroy a brother just for the sake of meat and drink to the weak I became weak that I might win the weak and I have become all things in short he says I have become everything in turn to men of every sort in other words I try to find common

ground with every person I meet whenever Paul met someone he tried to find some common ground to stand together with him in order to open a channel into his heart he didn't just stand in opposition to

everyone and he says I do all these things in order that by all possible means I might save someone and bring them to Christ I do everything for the sake of the gospel what a wonderful thing it is if we can say as servants of God that I do everything verse 23 for the sake of the gospel that I might become a joint partaker with Christ in proclaiming this gospel to others

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