

WHY PASTORS AND PREACHERS MUST WORK,
AND NOT GET THEIR LIVING FROM THE GOSPEL

For The Gospel's Sake

by Kenneth E. Roberson, Sr.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction 1

II. Elders (Including Pastors) And Church Preachers Must Work 1

 A. The Example Of Paul's Life:
 Paul Worked 2

 B. Paul Commanded The Ephesian Elders To Work 5

 C. Paul Commanded Christians To Work, And Made No Exception For Elders Or Church Preachers 10

III. 1 Cor. 9:14 Does Not Teach That Elders And Church Preachers Are To Live Of The Gospel . . 13

 A. Paul Had A Right To Live Of The Gospel, But He Did Not Exercise That Right 14

 1. Christians Have A Right To Eat Things Offered To Idols But Are Not To Exercise It When To Do So Would Offend Weak Christians (1 Cor. 8.) . . 14

 2. Paul Had A Right To Live Of The Gospel, But Did Not Exercise That Right Because He (1) Did Not Want To Hinder The Gospel, (2) Wanted To Win More People To Christ, and (3) Did Not Want To Offend Unbelievers (1 Cor. 9:1-23; 10:23-11:1.) 16

 a. 1 Cor. 9:1-23 16

 b. 1 Cor. 10:23-11:1 24

 B. 1 Cor. 9:14 Is Part Of A Discussion In Which Paul Focuses, Not On Any Rights Of Elders Or Church Preachers, But On Apostolic Rights As Part Of A Defense Of His Apostleship 26

C.	Even Assuming 1 Cor. 9:14 Teaches That Elders And Church Preachers Have A Right To Live Of The Gospel, Paul Is Teaching That The Right Is Not To Be Exercised . . .	29
1.	Paul Commanded The Corinthians To "Imitate" Him As He Imitated Christ, And Paul Did Not Exercise His Apostolic Right To Live Of The Gospel	29
2.	Exercising The Right To Live Of The Gospel Would Conflict With Paul's Other Commands	30
3.	Paul's Reasons For Not Exercising His Rights Are No Less Compelling Today	30
IV.	Elders Can Receive Financial Support	31
A.	The Example Of Paul's Life: Paul Received Support To Take Care Of His Needs	31
B.	Paul Taught That Elders And Those Teaching The Word Can Receive Support	33
1.	Gal. 6:6	33
2.	1 Tim. 5:17-18	33
3.	1 Tim. 3:2-3; Titus 1:7	36
V.	Conclusion	3

WHY PASTORS AND PREACHERS MUST WORK,
AND NOT GET THEIR LIVING FROM THE GOSPEL

For The Gospel's Sake

by Kenneth E. Roberson, Sr.*

I. *Introduction.*

Most Christians have heard a variety of sermons and teachings on the fact that Christians should give money to the church. This is as it should be since, as other essays discuss, Christians are to give. However, a balanced presentation on the subject of Christian giving requires consideration of the Scriptural principles which pertain, not only to those who *give*, but to those who *receive*. Accordingly, this essay considers what the Scriptures tell church leadership about how they should be financially supported.

This essay will demonstrate three things from the Scriptures. First, elders (including pastors) and church preachers must work for an income and/or as part of an exchange (e.g., working in exchange for food, clothing, etc.). Second, 1 Cor. 9:14, which says, “. . . the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel[.]” (King James Version (KJV)), cannot, when read in context, be relied upon to teach that elders who preach, or church preachers, are to live of the gospel. Third, elders can receive financial support. The essay will then make various concluding observations.

II. *Elders (Including Pastors) And Church Preachers Must Work.*

In this section, this essay will show from the Scriptures that elders and church preachers must work. Although pastoring and preaching are, in a sense, work, this is not what is meant. Instead, this essay will show that elders and church preachers, like church laity, must have a job, trade, or be employed in tasks *other* than their church ministries. We will see that the apostle Paul worked, commanded the Ephesian elders to work, and commanded Christians to work and made no exception for elders or church preachers. We use the term “church preachers” to refer to those who preach in church, as distinct from those who preach in regions where the gospel has not been heard, i.e., missionaries.¹

* A.B., Harvard University; J.D., Stanford Law School. Mr. Roberson is a California attorney. He can be contacted at profroberson@msn.com.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptural references in this section (section II) are to the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

A. *The Example Of Paul's Life: Paul Worked.*

Paul himself worked. To see this, this essay will review what Paul's epistles, and the Book of Acts, say on this issue.

By way of background, Paul's second missionary journey took him through parts of modern-day Turkey and Greece. The account of Paul's second missionary journey is found at Acts 15:36-18:22. During that journey, Paul founded the church in the city of Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4) in the Roman province of Macedonia. He later, during that journey, started a church in the city of Corinth (Acts 18:1-8) in the Roman province of Achaia. Both Thessalonica and Corinth are in modern-day Greece.

After founding the church in Thessalonica, Paul wrote epistles to it. Those epistles are First and Second Thessalonians. At 1 Thess. 2:5-10, Paul wrote:

(5) For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness-- (6) nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. (7) But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. (8) Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. (9) For you recall, brethren, our *labor and hardship, how working night and day* so as not to be a *burden* to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. (10) You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers[.]” (Italics added.)

The word “proclaimed” at verse 9 can be translated “preached.”² At 1 Thess. 2:9, Paul reminded the Thessalonians about his “labor and hardship”³ among the Thessalonians, and that he “work[ed] night and day” while he preached the gospel to them.

² The word “proclaimed” at verse 9 in the NASB is a translation of a form of the Greek word “kerusso” (Gk.: “κηρυσσω”; George V. Wigram and Ralph D. Winter, *The Word Study Concordance* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1972), pp. 422-423). The word “kerusso” or a form thereof is used 61 times in the New Testament in the KJV. (Wigram and Winter, p. 422.) In the KJV, “kerusso” or a form thereof is translated “preach” or a form thereof *53 times*. (Ibid.) Thus, the word “kerusso” or a form thereof is overwhelmingly translated “preach” or a form thereof in the KJV.

³ The word “hardship” (NASB) is a translation of the Greek word “moxthon” (Gk.: “μοχθον”) which means “labor, exertion, hardship . . .” (Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and adptd. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. revised and augmtd. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker [“BAGD”] (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 528, italics omitted.)

Paul was working night and day because he did not want to be a “burden” to the Thessalonians. That is, he did not want to take their *money* or rely on them for sustenance. 1 Thess. 2:9 implies then that, by the term “working,” Paul was referring to working *for an income, or as part of an exchange* (e.g., bartering work for food). By so “working,” Paul did not have to burden the Thessalonians.

Of course, a person could claim that preaching is working. Preaching is, of course, working in a sense, but not in the sense in which Paul used the term when he spoke of “working night and day.” Two facts show this. First, if, when Paul used the term “working” at 1 Thess. 2:9, he was referring to preaching, then he was saying that he worked by preaching. That is, he preached, and, in return, took money and/or other items (e.g., food, clothing) from the people to whom he preached. But if so, he burdened the people by taking their money or other items, the very thing Paul taught he did *not* do. Paul said he worked night and day so as *not* to be a burden. Thus, when Paul said at 1 Thess. 2:9 that he was “working night and day,” he could not have been referring to preaching as the kind of working he was doing.

Second, Paul did not preach “night and day” to the Thessalonians. He “reasoned” with them for only *three Sabbath days*. Thus, Acts 17:1-4 (KJV) says:

“(1) Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: (2) And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and *three sabbath days* reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, (3) Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. (4) And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”

Therefore, although, in common parlance, we might refer to preaching as working, and some might claim that they work by preaching, preaching was not the kind of work to which Paul was referring when he reminded the Thessalonians at 1 Thess. 2:9 that he had been “working night and day.”

Paul later wrote Second Thessalonians and, at 2 Thess. 3:6-8, he wrote:

“(6) Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. (7) For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, (8) nor did we eat anyone’s bread

without *paying* for it, but with *labor and hardship we kept working night and day* so that we would not be a *burden* to any of you[.]” (Italics added.)

Again, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he “work[ed] night and day” because he did not want to be a “burden” to them. Note the word “paying” in verse 8. The word “paying” is a translation of the Greek word “dorean” (Gk.: “δωρεάν”),⁴ which means here “as a gift, without payment, gratis.”⁵ Paul did not eat anyone’s bread without payment. The Greek word “dorean” in 2 Thess 3:8 is translated “paying” in the NASB, NIV, and other works.⁶ The word “paying” suggests that Paul paid *money* for his bread using the *income* he received by “working night and day.” As a result of Paul’s “paying” for his bread, he was not a “burden” to the Thessalonians.

After Paul founded the church in Thessalonica, he founded the church in Corinth. The Book of Acts provides insight as to how Paul worked, at least in Corinth. Acts 18:1-4 record what Paul did when he first arrived in Corinth:

“(1) After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. (2) And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, (3) *and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers.* (4) And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.” (Italics added.)

These verses teach that Paul was of the same trade as Aquila and Priscilla, who were tentmakers. Thus, Paul himself was a tentmaker. Moreover, these verses record that one of the first things Paul did when he entered Corinth to preach the gospel was to *get a job, plying his trade as a tentmaker, to work.* Again, these verses also show that the work Paul did was not the “work” of preaching, but the work or trade of tentmaking.

Paul founded the churches in the cities of Thessalonica and Corinth during his second missionary journey. Like his second missionary journey, Paul’s third missionary journey took him through parts of modern-day Turkey and Greece. The city of Ephesus was part of modern-day Turkey and, during Paul’s third missionary journey, he traveled to Ephesus. While there, he wrote First

⁴ Berry, p. 538.

⁵ BAGD, p. 210, para. 1.

⁶ The word “paying” is found in verse 8 in the New Revised Standard Version, the Amplified Bible, and in BAGD’s citation of this verse at p. 210, para. 1.

Corinthians,⁷ telling the Corinthians that he intended to travel to them during his journey. (1 Cor. 16:5.)

At 1 Cor. 4:11-13, Paul wrote:

“(11) To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; (12) and *we toil, working with our own hands*; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; (13) when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.”

(Italics added.)

1 Cor. 4:11-13 show that Paul was still working while he was in Ephesus during his third missionary journey. Those verses, along with 1 Thess. 2:5-10, 2 Thess. 3:6-8, and Acts 18:1-4, which we already have considered, show that Paul worked for an income, and/or as part of a barter exchange.

B. *Paul Commanded The Ephesian Elders To Work.*

At Acts 20:34-35, Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus,

“(34) You yourselves know that *these hands* ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. (35) In everything I showed *you* that by *working hard in this manner you must help the weak . . .*”

As we will see, at these verses Paul was teaching that church elders must not only help the weak, but *must work* and use the resulting proceeds (whether income, and/or items obtained in exchange) *to help the weak*.

By way of background, and as mentioned, Paul, during his third missionary journey, traveled westward to modern-day Turkey and ultimately to Greece. Later skirting the Turkish coast by ship while returning to Jerusalem and an uncertain fate, he stopped in the city of Miletus (Acts 20:15) on the Turkish coast. Paul had passed by Ephesus (Acts 20:16), so, once in Miletus, Paul summoned to him the elders of the church in Ephesus, which was near Miletus. Accordingly, Acts 20:17 (KJV) says, “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.” Once the Ephesian elders arrived in Miletus, Paul delivered to them what

⁷ The account of Paul’s third missionary journey is found at Acts 18:23-21:3 and, during that missionary journey he traveled to Ephesus. (Acts 19:1-20:1.) Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. (See 1 Cor. 16:8: “But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost[.]”; see also, e.g., Merrill F. Unger, “Corinthians, First Epistle,” Unger’s Bible Dictionary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), p. 221 [where Unger writes, concerning 1 Corinthians, “[w]e know it was written from Ephesus . . .”] and cites 1 Cor. 16:8-9.

has been referred to as his “farewell address,” speaking of things heavy on his heart, knowing they would see his face no more.

That farewell address is recorded at Acts 20:18-35. As part of that address, Paul said at Acts 20:22-35:

“(22) And now, behold, bound in Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, (23) except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. (24) But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. (25) And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more. (26) Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. (27) For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. (28) Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (29) I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; (30) and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (31) Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. (32) And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (33) *I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes.* (34) *You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.* (35) *In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

In the verses above, Paul was admonishing, not church laity or believers in general, but church elders. And, as shown below, Paul was telling the elders that they must not only help the weak, but must *work* and use the resulting proceeds to help the weak.

A number of observations are appropriate. First, at Acts 20:34, Paul used the phrase, “these hands ministered[.]” Paul frequently associated hands with work. (See 1 Cor. 4:12, “we toil, *working* with our own *hands*”[.]; 1 Thess. 4:11, “*work* with your own *hands*[.]”]; Eph. 4:28 (KJV), “*working* with his *hands*[.]”)⁸

⁸ In each of these verses, the word “work” or “working” is a translation of a form of the Greek word “ergadzomai” (Gk.: “εργαζομαι”; Wigram and Winter, p. 298).

Second, at Acts 20:34, Paul said, “*You yourselves know* that these hands ministered[.]” This essay noted earlier that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus when he was en route to Corinth during his third missionary journey. So it was while Paul was *in Ephesus* that he wrote at 1 Cor. 4:11-12:

“(11) To this *present* hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; (12) and *we toil, working with our own hands*[.]”

That is, even when he was in Ephesus (where he wrote 1 Cor.), Paul toiled, working with his own hands. And thus the Ephesian elders knew this.

Third, at Acts 20:35, Paul said, “In everything I showed you that by *working hard in this manner* you must help the weak[.]” When Paul used the phrase “working hard in this manner” (KJV: “so labouring”), Paul was referring back to Acts 20:34 and the phrase “these hands ministered.” Thus, when Paul’s “hands ministered,” he was “working hard” (KJV: “labouring”). Fourth, Paul told the Ephesian elders that he showed them that by “working hard in this manner” they must *help the weak* and remember that Jesus said it was more blessed to *give*.

It is highly unlikely that Paul would, with his own hands, literally *make* everything that he, and those with him, needed in terms of food, clothing, and shelter. For example, at 2 Thess. 3:8, Paul wrote: “nor did we *eat anyone’s bread* without *paying* for it, but with labor and hardship we kept *working night and day* so that we would not be a burden to any of you[.]” (Italics added.) Here, Paul did not make the bread—the bread originally belonged to someone else. However, Paul worked for it, either working for an income and paying money for the bread, or working in exchange for the bread. On the other hand, the fact that Paul was a tentmaker suggests he could provide shelter for himself and those with him.

It is also unlikely that Paul expected the Ephesian elders to use their own hands literally to *make* everything that they would use to help, or give to, the weak. Obviously the elders would not mint coins to give to the weak.

The above facts lead to our fifth point which is: when Paul said at Acts 20:34 that “these hands ministered,” this included the idea that he *worked for an income (and/or as part of an exchange)*. That is, he worked for an income and used the resulting proceeds to provide for himself and those with him, or worked in exchange for those provisions. Similarly, when, at Acts 20:35, Paul uses the phrase, “working hard in this manner” (KJV: “so labouring”) this includes the idea of working for an income and/or as part of an exchange.

Sixth, Paul said at Acts 20:35 that, “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you *must* help the weak[.]” The KJV uses the phrase “ought to” instead of “must.” However, the New International Version (NIV), like the NASB and New King James Version (NKJV), uses the word “must,” not “ought to.” And here, as shown below, the NASB, NIV, and NKJV are correct.

The phrase “you must help” at verse 35, is a translation of the Greek words “*dei antilambanesthai*” (Gk.: “*δει αντιλαμβανεσθαι*.”) That is, “*δει* [it is necessary] *αντιλαμβανεσθαι* [to help].” Note the Greek word “*δει*” is translated, “it is necessary.” This is because the Greek word “*δει*” means “*it is necessary, one must or has to, denoting compulsion of any kind.*”⁹ Paul was teaching the elders that they *must* help the weak. If, as the KJV indicates, they “ought to” do so, it was because they *must* do so.

Seventh, at Acts 20:35, Paul was teaching not only that elders must help the weak, but that elders *must* work for an income and/or as part of an exchange. Paul showed the elders that they *must* help the weak. He also showed them that “working hard in this manner” they must help the weak. We have seen that “working hard in this manner” includes the idea of *working for an income and/or as part of an exchange*. Thus, Paul was showing elders that (1) working for an income and/or as part of an exchange, (2) they must help the weak. That is, *the working for an income (and/or as part of an exchange) was to accompany the required help to the weak.*¹¹ But if the help was required, and the working for an

⁹ George Ricker Berry, *The Interlinear KJV Parallel New Testament In Greek And English* (Reading, Pa.: Handy Book Co., 1897; rpt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 377.

¹⁰ BAGD, p. 172, last italics added. See also Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based On Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), I, pp. 670-671 (§ 71.21), and p. 672 (§ 71.34). Section 71.34 states that “*dei*” means “to be that which *must necessarily* take place, often with the implication of inevitability – ‘*to be necessary, must.*’” (Italics added.) Section 71.21 states that “*dei*” means “to be something which should be done as the result of *compulsion, . . .*” (Italics added.) See also G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon Of The New Testament* (Edinburgh and New York, 1999), p. 99, which states that (1) “*dei*” means “one must, it is necessary[.]” (2) when prefaced by the Greek word for “not,” “*dei*” means “ought not, must not[.]” and (3) “*dei*” “denot[es] logical necessity.” (Italics omitted.) See also Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 126, which states that “*dei*” means “it is necessary, there is need of, it behooves, is right and proper[.]” (Italics omitted.) Thayer continues with five categories of the use of “*dei*,” each of which refers to “necessity.” Thayer also states that “*dei*” “seems to be more suggestive of moral obligation, denoting [especially] that constraint which arises from divine appointment[.]”

¹¹ The phrase “working hard in this manner you must help the weak” at verse 35 (NASB), is a translation of the Greek words “*ουτως κοπιωντας δει αντιλαμβανεσθαι των ασθενουντων.*” (Berry, p. 377.) That is, *ουτως* [in this manner] *κοπιωντας* [working hard] *δει* [it is necessary] *αντιλαμβανεσθαι* [to help] *των* [the] *ασθενουντων* [weak].”

The word “*κοπιωντας*” (in English, transliterated “*kopiontas*”) can be translated “working hard” or “laboring.” The word “*κοπιωντας*” is a present participle. (Barbara Friberg and Timothy Friberg, eds. *Analytical Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 440.) A participle can be “used *adverbially* to indicate some circumstance under which the action of the *main* verb takes place.”

income (and/or as part of an exchange) was to accompany the required help, this means *working for an income (and/or as part of an exchange) was required as well*. Paul was teaching elders that they *must* “work[] hard in this manner” which included the idea of *working for an income and/or as part of an exchange*.

Eighth, at Acts 20:34-35, Paul was teaching that elders must work for an income (or as part of an exchange), and use the resulting proceeds *to help the weak*. Again, at those verses, Paul said

“(34) You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and *to the men who were with me*. (35) In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must *help the weak* and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

At verse 34, Paul taught that he worked for an income and/or as part of an exchange, to provide for himself and those with him. At verse 35, Paul taught that, working for an income, and/or as part of an exchange, elders must help the weak. The suggestion is that, even as Paul worked *to provide for the men with him*, elders must work *to help the weak*.

This is supported by the rest of verse 35. For at that verse, Paul also said that the elders must “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, “It is more blessed to *give* than to receive.” (Italics added.)

Ironically, the idea that elders must work for an income (and/or as part of an exchange) to help the weak might seem foreign to contemporary Christianity. Far too frequently it is the other way around--the weak are routinely called upon to work for an income to help elders. And many Christians can spend a lifetime in church and never hear a sermon on Acts 20:35.

Jesus did say “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” However, it is important to note that the only time this saying is found in the Bible is here at Acts 20:35. That is, *the only time this saying of Jesus is found in the Bible, Paul was quoting the saying to church elders*. Although pastors and elders frequently quote

(Black, p. 138, italics added.) The word “κοπιωντας” is used adverbially in verse 35. In the phrase, “ουτως [in this manner] κοπιωντας [working hard] δει [it is necessary] αντιλαμβανεσθαι [to help][.]” the main verb is “δει [it is necessary] αντιλαμβανεσθαι [to help].” The participle “κοπιωντας” is used adverbially here to indicate some circumstance under which the required “help[ing]” takes place. That is, the required helping takes place under the circumstance of “*working hard*.” Moreover, Paul said, “ουτως [in this manner]” working hard. Thus, the required helping takes place under the circumstance of working hard *in this manner*. That is, *the required helping takes place under the circumstance of working for an income and/or as part of an exchange*.

to Christians in general the saying, “It is more blessed to *give* than to receive” in order to encourage Christians to give *money* to the church (and to pastors and elders), it should be remembered that the only time this saying is found in the Bible, the apostle Paul was quoting it to *church elders* to admonish *them* to help the weak. And Paul referred to this saying, not as coming simply from Jesus, but from the *Lord* Jesus, a reference to Jesus as Master.

This is not to suggest that the saying “It is more blessed to give than to receive” applies only to church elders, or that Christians should not give to churches, pastors, and elders. Our essays *Christian Giving In Paul’s Epistle To The Galatians*, *Christian Giving In Paul’s First Epistle To The Corinthians*, and *Christian Giving In Paul’s Second Epistle To The Corinthians*, as well as this essay *infra*, cite numerous Scriptures supporting Christian giving and, in particular, Christian giving to the church and elders, including pastors. Nor is this to suggest that all those who teach that the weak, or Christians in general, are to help church elders financially are motivated by covetousness. But it is clear that the only *context* in which the saying “It is more blessed to give than to receive” was quoted in Scripture was an *admonition to church elders*, not to Christians in general. Thus, if it is fair for elders and pastors to quote Jesus’s saying to teach that Christians should give money to the church, it is more than fair to quote Jesus’s saying to teach elders and pastors to give money to the weak.

At Acts 20:35, Paul was teaching not only that elders must help the weak but, *working hard for an income, and/or as part of an exchange*, elders must help the weak. By so working, the elders would be able to help the weak, in accord with the saying of the Lord, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

C. *Paul Commanded Christians To Work, And Made No Exception For Elders Or Church Preachers.*

Paul commanded Christians to work, and in the verses in which he did so, he made no exception for elders and church preachers. We can see this if we return to 1 Thessalonians. For at 1 Thess. 4:9-12 (KJV), Paul wrote:

“(9) But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. (10) And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; (11) And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and *to work with your own hands*, as we *commanded* you; (12) That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.” (Italics added.)

At 1 Thess. 4:10-11, one of the things which Paul beseeched the Thessalonians to do was to work with their own hands. Indeed, beyond beseeching them, Paul, at 1 Thess. 4:11, reminded the Thessalonians that, at a *previous* time, he had commanded them to work with their own hands. One of the reasons Paul said he wanted the Thessalonians to work with their own hands was that he wanted them to “have lack of nothing.” It seems unlikely that Paul meant that each of the Thessalonians literally would make with his or her hands everything he or she needed. Instead, Paul suggests that the Thessalonians would obtain what they needed from the proceeds (whether income or items in exchange) that the Thessalonians generated from their work. Thus, Paul commanded and beseeched the Thessalonians to work.

Similarly, at 2 Thess. 3:6-10, Paul said,

“(6) Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. (7) For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, (8) nor did we eat anyone’s bread without *paying* for it, but with labor and hardship *we kept working night and day* so that we would not be a *burden* to any of you; (9) not because we do not have the right to this, but *in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you would follow our example.* (10) For even when we were with you, *we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.*”

(Italics added.)

This essay discussed some of these verses, i.e., 2 Thess 3:6-8, in our earlier demonstration that Paul worked. We revisit these verses, plus verses 9 and 10, because 2 Thess. 3:6-10 support our showing that Paul taught Christians to work. Paul there taught that he had a right to eat the Corinthians’ bread without paying for it (Paul does not say that the Corinthians in general had such a right). However, instead, he worked night and day, and paid for his bread. Moreover, at 2 Thess. 3:9, Paul told the Thessalonians that *he wanted them to follow his example.*

Further, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that when he was with them, he gave them an “*order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.*” It is noteworthy that 2 Thess. 3:10 contains the phrase “*we used to give you this order[.]*” This phrase is a translation of the Greek word “*parengellomen*” (Gk.: “*παρηγγελλομεν*”).¹² The word “*parengellomen*” is a form of the word

¹² Berry, p. 538.

“paranggello” (Gk.: “παραγγελλω”),¹³ which means to “give orders, command, instruct, direct”¹⁴ Thus, the KJV translates “parenggellomen” as “we commanded[.]” Moreover, “parenggellomen,” the word used at 2 Thess. 3:10, is in the Greek imperfect tense.¹⁵ In particular, the word is a “customary imperfect”¹⁶ which signifies “habitual action in the past”¹⁷ and thus “parenggellomen” is commonly translated “used to[.]”¹⁸ Accordingly, the NASB translates “parenggellomen” as “we *used to* give you this order” because Paul *habitually* ordered (KJV: “commanded”) the Thessalonians that “if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.” These facts evidence that Paul wanted them to work.

Paul’s later letter to the Corinthians, that is, 1 Corinthians, provides additional evidence that Paul wanted Christians to work. At 1 Cor. 4:11-17, Paul said,

“(11) To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; (12) and *we toil, working with our own hands*; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; (13) when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now. (14) I do not write these things to shame you, but to *admonish* you as my beloved children. (15) For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. (16) *I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me.* (17) For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and *he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*” (Italics added.)

This essay quoted some of these verses, i.e., 1 Cor. 4:11-13, in the previous discussion of the fact that Paul worked. Those verses, plus verses 14-17, provide evidence that Paul taught Christians to work. After saying, “we toil, working with our own hands[.]” Paul “admonish[ed]” the Corinthians, exhorted them to “be imitators of me[.]” and told them that Timothy would “remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.” This provides evidence that Paul wanted the Corinthians to imitate him and work for an income and/or as part of an exchange, and that Paul taught Christians in every church to do this.

¹³ Wigram and Winter, p. 588.

¹⁴ BAGD, p. 613.

¹⁵ Friberg and Friberg, p. 632.

¹⁶ David Alan Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 49, § 54; H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar Of The Greek New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 188.

¹⁷ Black, pp. 49-50, § 54.

¹⁸ Black, pp. 49-50, § 54; Dana and Mantey, p. 188.

Paul's admonition at Ephesians 4:28 (KJV) is pertinent. There Paul said, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather *let him labour, working with his hands* the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." The implication is that, by working, one would be enabled to "give" to the needy. This would include money and/or other things.

Paul did not teach at Eph. 4:28 that working with one's hands was something that only repentant thieves were to do. Eph. 4:28 applied to repentant thieves the teaching that 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17 applied to Christians in general--work.

At 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17, which we have considered, Paul taught that Christians were to work for an income and/or as part of an exchange. These verses are particularly important to our demonstration that Paul taught elders and church preachers to work, *since the above verses make no exception for Christians who are elders or church preachers*. Thus, unless some other verses create an exception, *1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17 apply to elders and church preachers, as well as to Christians in general, and elders and church preachers are to work for an income and/or as part of an exchange*. And as we will see, there are no exceptions to these verses.¹⁹

III. *1 Cor. 9:14 Does Not Teach That Elders And Church Preachers Are To Live Of The Gospel.*

In this section, this essay will show that, although Paul said at 1 Cor. 9:14 (KJV) that ". . . the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel[,]" Paul does not here teach that *elders or church preachers* are to live of the gospel. As to this issue, we will make three points. First, in accord with 1 Cor. 9:14, Paul had a *right* to live of the gospel. However, *he did not exercise* that right because he did not want to hinder the gospel, wanted to win more people to Christ, did "all things for the sake of the gospel," and wanted to "give no offense." Second, 1 Cor. 9:14 is part of a discussion in which Paul focuses, not on any rights of elders or church preachers, but on his *apostolic* rights as part of a defense of his *apostleship*. Only when 1 Cor. 9:14 is read *broadly, beyond its context*, can one argue that, at that verse, Paul was focusing on elders and church preachers, and teaching that they have a right to live of the gospel.

Third, even assuming for sake of argument that 1 Cor. 9:14 teaches that elders and church preachers have a right to live of the gospel, Paul is teaching that the

¹⁹ In particular, this essay will show that 1 Cor. 9:14 (KJV), in which Paul says, ". . . the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel[]" creates no exception to the teaching that elders and church preachers are to work.

right is *not* to be exercised, as shown by the facts that (1) he told the Corinthians to imitate him, and he did not exercise his right to live of the gospel, (2) exercising the right would conflict with Paul's command that the Ephesian elders were to work, and with Paul's unqualified commands that Christians are to work, and (3) Paul's reasons for not exercising his right then are just as compelling against the exercise of that right by others today.

A. Paul Had A Right To Live Of The Gospel, But He Did Not Exercise That Right.

At 1 Cor. 8, Paul wrote, not merely about the Corinthians' *rights*, but about their *responsibilities towards others* when it came to eating things which had been offered to idols. As we will see, in that chapter, Paul taught the Corinthians that they had a *right* to eat things which had been offered to idols. But he also taught that, *for the sake of others*, that right was *not to be exercised* if *others* would be offended. A principle of 1 Cor. 8, then, was *just because you have a right doesn't mean you have to exercise it, and it can be better, for the sake of others, not to exercise the right.*

Paul did not write chapter and verse numbers for 1 Cor. 8 and 9. Instead, 1 Cor. 8 and 9 are both threads in a single tapestry of thought. Thus, as we will see below, at 1 Cor. 9, Paul wrote, not merely about *his rights*, but about *his responsibilities towards others* when it came to collecting money for *himself* from those to whom he preached. As we will see, in that chapter, Paul taught the Corinthians that, as an apostle, he had a *right* not to work and a *right* to get his living from the gospel, i.e., preaching, and receiving money and/or other items from those to whom he preached. However, Paul also taught that he did not exercise those rights because he did not want to hinder the gospel, and he wanted to win more people to Christ. Thus, to understand 1 Cor. 9 on the issue of rights and responsibilities, it is necessary to understand 1 Cor. 8.

1. Christians Have A Right To Eat Things Offered To Idols, But Are Not To Exercise It When To Do So Would Offend Weak Christians. (1 Cor. 8.)

At 1 Cor. 8 (KJV),²⁰ Paul wrote,

“(1) Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. (2) And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. (3) But if any man love God, the same is known of him. (4) As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we

²⁰ In this section (section III.A.1.), Scriptural references are to the KJV, unless otherwise indicated.

know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. (5) For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) (6) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (7) Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. (8) But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. (9) But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. (10) For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; (11) And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? (12) But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. (13) Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”

Many Corinthians *knew* that it was alright to eat things which had been offered to idols. “[W]e know,” Paul taught, that the idol was irrelevant and there was only one God. (1 Cor. 8:4.) Similarly, the “meat” (NASB: “food”) which had been offered to idols was irrelevant. (1 Cor. 8:8.) Paul therefore acknowledged at 1 Cor. 8:9 that the Corinthians had a “liberty” to eat things offered to idols. The word “liberty” at 1 Cor. 8:9 is a translation of the Greek word “exousia” (Gk.: “ἐξουσία”).²¹ It conveys the idea here of “*freedom of choice, right to act, decide, . . .*”²² That is, Paul acknowledged at 1 Cor. 8:9 that the Corinthians had the *right* to eat things offered to idols.

But Paul also acknowledged that “there is not in every man that knowledge[.]” (1 Cor. 9:7.) Those who lacked knowledge of their right to eat things offered to idols, and who ate the things as things offered to idols, were the “weak.” (1 Cor. 9:9, 10.) Because they lacked knowledge of their right, and their consciences were weak, they would be defiled if they ate. But a weak Christian might be emboldened to eat anyway, simply because the weak Christian was following the example of a “strong” Christian who, with no difficulty, was eating with knowledge of his or her right to eat. Thus, when the Christian who had knowledge exercised his or her *right* to eat things offered to idols, that exercise became a “stumblingblock” (1 Cor. 8:9) to the weak Christian, and the exercise of that right was a sin against the weak Christian and Christ. (1 Cor. 8:12.) Accordingly, Paul

²¹ Wigram and Winter, pp. 269-270.

²² BAGD, p. 277. The word “exousia” can also be translated “power,” as it is at 1 Cor. 9:4, 5, 6, 12, and 18. (Wigram and Winter, pp. 269-270.)

wrote at 1 Cor. 8:13: “Wherefore, if meat make my *brother to offend*, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my *brother to offend*.”

Therefore, 1 Cor. 8 taught the Corinthians that they had a right to eat things which had been offered to idols but, for the sake of others, that right should not be exercised if weak Christians would be offended. Just because the Corinthians had a right did not mean that they had to exercise it, and when the exercise of the right would offend weak Christians, the right was not to be exercised.²³

2. *Paul Had A Right To Live Of The Gospel, But Did Not Exercise That Right Because He (1) Did Not Want To Hinder The Gospel, (2) Wanted To Win More People To Christ, And (3) Did Not Want To Offend Unbelievers. (1 Cor. 9:1-23; 10:23-11:1.)*

As shown below, at 1 Cor. 9:1-23, Paul taught that he, as an apostle, had *rights* (e.g., the right not to work and right to live of the gospel) that many Corinthians did not have, but, for the sake of others, he did not *exercise* those rights. This was analogous to Paul’s point as to the Corinthians—they had a *right* to eat things offered to idols but, when the exercise of the right would offend, the right was not to be exercised.²⁴

a. *1 Cor. 9:1-23.*

At 1 Cor. 9:1-23, Paul wrote:

“(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? (2) 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.

(3) My defense to those who examine me is this: (4) Do we not have a right to eat and drink? (5) Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? (6) Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?

(7) Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?

²³ If, as in the case with the eating of things offered to idols, God does not care one way or the other whether one eats, Paul would be free to eat but would not do so if it would offend someone else. But if, as in the case with the teaching of the Word, God does care what is taught, Paul would teach the Word despite the fact that the Word might offend others. (Gal. 1:6-10.)

²⁴ In this section (section III.A.2.), Scriptural references are to the NASB, unless otherwise indicated.

(8) I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? (9) For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.’ God is not concerned about oxen, is He? (10) Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.

(11) If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? (12) If others share the right over you, do we not more?

Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

(13) Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? (14) *So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.*

(15) *But I have used none of these things.* And I am not writing these things that it may be done so in my case; for *it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.*

(16) For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. (17) For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

(18) What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. (19) For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. (20) And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; (21) to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. (22) To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, *that I may by all means save some.* (23) *And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”*

Paul’s point to the Corinthians at 1 Cor. 8 in connection with eating things offered to idols was that just because they had a right did not mean they had to

exercise it, and it could be better, for the sake of others, not to exercise the right. And Paul made an analogous point here at 1 Cor. 9:1-23, as the below discussion shows.

In 1 Cor. 9:1-2, Paul declares his freedom, that he held the high office of an apostle, and that he was the very person whom the Lord had used to convert the Corinthians to Christ. So if anybody had rights, Paul had rights. According to verse 4, Paul had a “right” to eat and drink. The suggestion from the context is that he had a right to eat and drink at the expense of the Corinthians.²⁵ According to verse 5, Paul, like the apostle Peter, had a “right” to take along a believing wife. Again, the suggestion from the context is that Paul had a right to take a believing wife with him, and at the expense of the Corinthians, when he traveled on his apostolic journeys. And according to verse 6, Paul had a “right” to refrain from working, i.e., he had a *right not to work* for an income or as part of an exchange. Again, the suggestion is that he had a right not to work, at the expense of the Corinthians. That is, he had a right not to work for an income or as part of an exchange, and a right to collect money and/or other items from the Corinthians for his livelihood.

At 1 Cor. 9:7, Paul relies on the Corinthians’ knowledge of their everyday world to support his point. At that verse he teaches that the soldier, husbandman, and shepherd have a right to receive benefits from those for whom they labor.²⁶ And at 1 Cor. 9:8-11, Paul teaches that this right to receive benefits is not only a secular principle, but a spiritual principle supported by Scripture. Thus, at 1 Cor. 9:9, Paul observes that the law of Moses (Deut. 25:4) said, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” The term “threshing” referred to “. . . the ancient agricultural practice of driving an ox drawing a threshing-sledge over the grain to release the kernels from the stalk.”²⁷ A muzzled ox could not eat the grain that the ox was threshing. But Paul, writing inspired Scripture, interpreted that verse to teach that he had a right to receive benefits from the Corinthians.

1 Cor. 9:12a suggests that there were “others” who were at least claiming to have a right to receive benefits from the Corinthians. Paul reasons, if others have that right, don’t I?

²⁵ When the Lord sent the 12 apostles and 70 missionaries to preach in the cities, He taught them that they could expect to receive lodging from the people to whom they went to preach. (Lk. 9:4; 10:5-7.) In particular, He told the 70 missionaries that they were to “eat[]” and “drink[]” (Lk. 10:7, KJV) those things given to them by the householder.

²⁶ The soldier frequently goes to war in a foreign country, receiving provisions from the home country. The one who plants a vineyard tends to it and receives a later benefit at harvest. The shepherd attends to the flock and receives a daily benefit of milk from the flock.

²⁷ Gordon D. Fee, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians,” *The New International Commentary On The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), p. 406.

But what does Paul teach at 1 Cor. 9:12b? There he said, “Nevertheless, *we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.* Paul did not exercise that right, i.e., his right to receive benefits from the Corinthians, because he did not want to cause a hindrance to the gospel of Christ. (KJV: “lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.”) That is, *just because Paul had the right to receive benefits did not mean he had to exercise it, and it was better not to exercise that right so that the gospel would not be hindered.*

Paul’s motives in preaching the gospel were unimpeachable. Nonetheless, as one commentator observes, “[o]bviously, if [Paul] took maintenance, he *might be suspected* of preaching merely for the sake of what he got by it. Moreover, those who had to maintain him *might resent the burden*, and be unwilling to listen to him.”²⁸

At 1 Cor. 9:13, Paul continued to give examples to teach that he had a right to receive benefits from those for whom he labored. At that verse, he taught that those who labored in the things of the temple and altar had a right to receive benefits from the things of the temple and altar.²⁹

This essay has shown that according to 1 Cor. 9:1-6, Paul had many rights as an apostle, including a right not to work. Paul was not talking about a right to lay back and starve. He was implying that he had a right not to work for an income or as part of an exchange, and a corresponding right to receive income and/or other items from those to whom he preached. At 1 Cor. 9:14, he explicitly refers to his right to live of the gospel. The KJV reads: “Even so hath the Lord *ordained* that they which preach the gospel should *live* of the gospel.” (Italics added.) The NASB reads: “So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”

Importantly, however, Paul next told the Corinthians at 1 Cor. 9:15a, “*But I have used none of these things.*” This means that Paul *did not exercise* his rights to receive benefits from the Corinthians to whom he preached, including his right to get his living from the gospel.

The Lord had “ordained” (KJV) or “directed” (NASB) those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. Yet Paul obviously did not view that ordination or direction as a *commandment which obligated* him to get his living

²⁸ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary On The First Epistle Of St. Paul To The Corinthians*, *The International Critical Commentary*, 2nd ed., eds. Samuel Driver, Alfred Plummer, Charles Briggs (New York: 1914; rpt. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), p. 186, italics added.

²⁹ See. e.g., Numbers 18 and the rights of Aaronic priests to enjoy the offerings of the Lord.

from the gospel. Otherwise, (1) Paul would have been *sinning* when he “used none of these things,” and (2) when, under the inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16), Paul *wrote* that he “used none of these things,” Paul would have been *writing approvingly, under inspiration*, about his sinful failure to comply with a commandment of the Lord. Thus, Paul viewed the Lord’s ordination or direction, not as a commandment, but as *creating a right* to live of the gospel.³⁰ Whether that right was to be *exercised* was another matter.

At 1 Cor. 9:15b, Paul wrote, “it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.” Paul’s boast was that he “used none of these things,” e.g., he did not exercise his right to receive benefits from the Corinthians, and he did not exercise his right to get his living from the gospel.

And Paul’s decision not to exercise his rights was not merely a matter of personal preference. First, Paul was writing under the *inspiration of God* when he wrote at 1 Cor. 9:15: “. . . it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.” Second, in that verse, Paul said it was better to *die* than have any man make Paul’s boast an empty one.

In short, Paul told the Corinthians that he had a choice. On the one hand, he could work for an income and/or as part of an exchange, and not live from the gospel, *even if the result was that he starved and died*. On the other hand, he could choose not to work and instead to live from the gospel. Paul, writing under the inspiration of God, taught that it was of the *utmost importance* that he choose the first alternative.

And why did Paul use “none of these things,” including his right to live from the gospel? Remember, Paul was continuing to make a point to the Corinthians: just because one has a right does not mean one has to exercise it, and when the exercise of the right would offend, the right was not to be exercised. Thus, as we will see below, Paul “used none of these things” so that he could “*win the more*” to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19), use “*all means*” to “*save some*” (1 Cor. 9:22), and “*do all things for the sake of the gospel*” (1 Cor. 9:23).

³⁰ The Lord, the second Person of the Trinity, directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. The Holy Spirit, the third Person, taught through Paul that that direction merely created a right and that, in order that the gospel not be hindered, Paul did not exercise that right. These facts suggest that, as to apostles (1) the Lord’s direction was designed in part to convey the *importance of the Lord and His work* by showing that His work was at least as important as any secular work, and (2) the Holy Spirit’s teaching was designed in part to convey the *importance of the people* to whom the apostles were commissioned to go.

Paul makes this point at 1 Cor. 9:16-23, in which Paul reveals the following. If Paul had preached the gospel of his own free will, he would have had a reward and something about which he could have boasted. But Paul did not preach the gospel of his own free will. The phrase “against my will” in 1 Cor. 9:17 is a translation of a Greek word,³¹ one meaning of which is “not of one’s own freewill.”³² Paul’s point at 1 Cor. 9:17 is not that he preached *against* his will. In fact, after his conversion, Paul demonstrated an early willingness to do whatever the Lord asked of him. (Acts 9:6, 26:19.) Paul’s point at 1 Cor. 9:17 is that, apart from whether he was subjectively willing to preach, he was objectively required to preach by God. Paul preached, not of his own free will, not free to do otherwise, but because God compelled him to preach, like a steward or slave is compelled to perform a duty. Since Paul preached the gospel as a matter of compulsion, the *fact* that he preached did not merit a reward and gave him nothing about which he could boast.

What then was Paul’s reward? At 1 Cor. 9:18-19, Paul writes,

“(18) What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. (19) *For* though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, *that I might win the more.*”

Paul preached the gospel “without charge[.]” (1 Cor. 9:18.) The Greek word translated “without charge” here is “adapanon” (Gk.: “αδαπανον”),³³ which means “free of charge.”³⁴ Similarly, Paul later told the Corinthians, at 2 Cor. 11:7 (KJV), that he preached to them the gospel “freely.” The word “freely” is a translation of the Greek word “dorean” (Gk.: “δωρεαν”),³⁵ which, as we previously have seen, means “as a gift, without payment, gratis.”³⁶ Paul preached the gospel *free of charge, as a gift.*

At 1 Cor. 9:18 (NASB), Paul is saying that his reward was that he preached the gospel without charge, not making full use of his right. But Paul is not content with saying that only. The word “[f]or”³⁷ with which verse 19 begins signals his explanation of verse 18. And part of his explanation at verse 19 is that he makes himself a slave to all so that he might *win* (KJV: “gain”) *more people to Christ.*

³¹ The Greek word is “akon” (Gk.: “ακων”). Berry, p. 451.

³² Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament* 515 (Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., ed. 1980), p. 415.

³³ Berry, p. 451.

³⁴ BAGD, p. 15.

³⁵ Berry, p. 484.

³⁶ BAGD, p. 210, para. 1.

³⁷ The word “for” at 1 Cor. 9:19 is a translation of the Greek word “gar” (Gk.: “γαρ”; Berry, p. 451.)

As if to emphasize the point, Paul, in verses 20-22, repeats four times this theme of *winning various people to Christ*. Paul's reward, according to the NASB (and as we will see, the KJV and NIV) is that he preached the gospel without charge, *but this reward is associated with a goal: winning more people to Christ*.

The NASB (like the KJV and NIV) separates verse 18 into a question and answer, and treats verse 19 as a statement.³⁸ As a consequence, verse 18 produces an unusual teaching: Paul's reward was that he preached the gospel without charge, that is, his reward is to get nothing. But the word "reward" implies that Paul would get something.

Paul did not write the verse numbers, and no one knows whether punctuation was used by the authors of the New Testament,³⁹ including by Paul at 1 Cor. 9:18-19. One Greek commentator⁴⁰ translates verse 18 as a single long question, followed by the answer at verse 19. That translation reads:

“(18) What then is my reward that I while preaching, render the gospel without cost in order not to use to the full my power in the gospel? (19) *For being free from (the power of) all men, I enslaved myself to all, that I might gain the largest number.*”⁴¹

Based on this translation, verse 18 is a single question, and verse 19 identifies the reward. The reward is *the winning of the largest number of people to Christ*.⁴²

In any event, whether (1) as indicated by the NASB, KJV, and NIV, Paul's reward was that he preached the gospel without charge, and this reward was *associated* with the goal of winning more people to Christ, or (2) as indicated by the above Greek commentator, winning more people to Christ was *itself* Paul's reward, *Paul preached the gospel without charge to win more people to Christ*.

At 1 Cor. 9:1-23, Paul was teaching that he, as an apostle, had *rights* (e.g., the right not to work and right to live of the gospel) that many Corinthians did not

³⁸ The KJV renders verses 18 and 19, “18 What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel. 19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.” The NIV renders the verses, “18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. 19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.”

³⁹ Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar Of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 10.

⁴⁰ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), II, p. 547.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, italics added.

⁴² On a similar note, Alford observes that, at 1 Thess. 2:19-20, Paul wrote, “19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20 For ye are our glory and joy.” The Thessalonians *themselves* are Paul's crown and, this implies, *his reward*.

have but, for the sake of others, he did not *exercise* those rights. This was analogous to Paul's point as to the Corinthians—they had a *right* to eat things offered to idols but, when the exercise of the right would offend, the right was not to be exercised. Indeed, the stakes were higher for Paul if he exercised his rights than they were for the Corinthians if they exercised theirs. If the Corinthians exercised their rights, they could offend a weak Christian, but at least that person was saved. *But if Paul exercised his rights, he could offend an unbeliever whose eternal salvation was at stake.*

Paul did not have to preach the gospel as a gift. Nonetheless, Paul, who, in the *fact* that he preached the gospel, was a slave to God by compulsion, became, in the *way* he preached the gospel, a slave to men by choice. And he did so in order that he would “cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ,” “win the more” people to Christ, use “all means” to “save some,” and “do all things for the sake of the gospel.”⁴³

It should be noted that Paul was not the only one to labor without charge in the dissemination of the gospel. The apostle John, at 3 John 1:5-8 (NASB), encouraged Christians to support Christians who were spreading the gospel, even when the Christians who were spreading the gospel were strangers. John wrote:

“(5) Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; (6) and they bear witness to your love before the church; and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. (7) *For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.* (8) Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.”

(Italics added.)

⁴³ Another reason Paul preached the gospel without charge was that he wanted to ferret out the false apostles who were teaching false doctrine for gain. (2 Cor. 11:1-15, 12:14-19.) Paul threw down a challenge to false apostles—if you truly are apostles, preach for free like me! This is not to say that all those today who do not preach the gospel without charge are the equivalent of false apostles or false teachers. It is to say, however that the problem of false apostles was sufficiently prevalent in the commercial world of Paul's day that, in order to smoke out those who were “in it for the buck,” Paul challenged them to be like him and preach the gospel freely, without charge, knowing they would not rise to the challenge. Even assuming elders and church preachers have a right to live of the gospel, what would happen in today's commercial world if elders and church preachers (or at least some!) chose not to exercise that right, in part to smoke out the false teachers of today?

b. *1 Cor. 10:23-11:1.*

At 1 Cor. 9:24-10:22, Paul begins to discuss issues other than the Corinthians' right to eat things offered to idols and whether the Corinthians should exercise that right. Those issues include Paul's admonition to the Christians to flee idolatry, and to not participate in the pagan rituals in which things are offered to idols.

But at 1 Cor. 10:23-11:1, Paul returns to his discussion of whether the Corinthians can *eat* things which have been offered to idols. Moreover, he concludes that discussion by reminding them of his previous teaching in 1 Cor. 9:1-23 that he pleased "all men" that they may be "saved." He also reminds them of his previous teaching in 1 Cor. 8 that the Corinthians are not to exercise their right to eat things offered to idols where to do so would offend weak Christians. Paul then implores the Corinthians to "[b]e imitators" of him as he imitates Christ, that is, just as he refrained from exercising his apostolic rights where refraining would benefit unbelievers, the Corinthians were to refrain from exercising their rights where refraining would benefit weak believers.

At 1 Cor. 10:23-30, Paul wrote:

"23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. 25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience' sake; 26 For the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains. 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you, and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone should say to you, 'This is meat sacrificed to idols,' do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; 29 I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?"

Paul teaches that all things are lawful, including, therefore, eating things offered to idols. But all things do not edify, including, therefore, eating such things if it would be better for the sake of others not to eat. Thus, at 1 Cor. 10:25-30, Paul teaches that the Christian has a *right* to eat anything sold in a market or offered at a feast, and the fact that the food previously had been offered to idols is irrelevant. However, if someone *complains* that the food has been offered to idols, the Christian should not *exercise* the Christian's right to eat if doing so would offend the conscience of someone else.

Paul concludes by saying, at 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1:

“(31) Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (32) Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; (33) just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, that they may be saved. (1) Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

Here Paul summarized in three commands the philosophy underlying his teaching: (1) “do all to the glory of God,” (2) “[g]ive no offense,” and (3) “[b]e imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

Parenthetically, the following should be noted. The verse “[b]e imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ[.]” is found in many Bibles at the *beginning* of chapter 11 as 1 Cor. 11:1. However, the verse is in fact a *conclusion* to Paul’s *preceding* discussion. That is, it should be numbered, if anything, 1 Cor. 10:34. As one commentator observes concerning 1 Cor. 11:1:

“This final imperative has suffered from one of the more unfortunate chapter divisions in the [New Testament]. The language and argument are such that it seems clearly to conclude the parenthesis of 10:23-33. It is not enough for Paul that he appeal to his own example. They are to follow (‘imitate’) that example, [fn. omitted] in the same way that he has ‘imitated’ Christ. . . . It is hard to imagine a more telling way to end this long argument.”⁴⁴

It should also be noted that in 1 Corinthians, when Paul begins a discussion of a new theme, he frequently begins with the word “Now.” (1 Cor. 1:10, 7:1, 25; 8:1; 11:2; 11:17 (KJV); 12:1; 16:1.) *This is exactly what Paul has done at 1 Cor. 11:2*, where Paul, using the word “Now,” begins a new discussion, praising the Corinthians. This is to be compared with 1 Cor. 11:17 (KJV), where Paul, again using the word “Now,” begins a new discussion, this time to discuss things about which he does *not* praise the Corinthians. But if so, 1 Cor. 11:1 is a conclusion, not the beginning of a new section. Thus, even as Paul teaches the Corinthians at 1 Cor. 10:32-33 to follow his example (give no offense even as he pleases all men), so at 1 Cor. 11:1, he concludes by telling the Corinthians to follow his example just as he follows Christ’s example.

When Paul told the Corinthians at 1 Cor. 10:31 that “[w]hether, . . . you *eat* or drink . . . do all to the glory of God[.]” the word “eat” reminded the Corinthians about Paul’s discussion at 1 Cor. 8 about their rights and responsibilities

⁴⁴ Fee, p. 490.

concerning eating things offered to idols. When Paul told the Corinthians at 1 Cor. 10:32-33 “[g]ive no offense . . . just as I also please *all men* . . . that they may be *saved*[,]” the terms “all men” and “saved” reminded the Corinthians about the terms “all men” and “save” at 1 Cor. 9:22. 1 Cor. 9:22 was part of Paul’s discussion at 1 Cor. 9:1-23 about his rights and responsibilities concerning living of the gospel. Thus, *at 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1, Paul taught the Corinthians, among other things, that, just as Paul pleased all men by not exercising his right to live of the gospel, the Corinthians were to “[b]e imitators” of Paul as he imitated Christ, and were not to exercise their right to eat things offered to idols where to do so would offend weak Christians.* 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1 thus summarize, and expand upon, Paul’s teachings at 1 Cor. 8 and 9:1-23.

B. *1 Cor. 9:14 Is Part Of A Discussion In Which Paul Focuses, Not On Any Rights Of Elders Or Church Preachers, But On Apostolic Rights As Part Of A Defense Of His Apostleship.*

At 1 Cor. 9:14 (NASB),⁴⁵ Paul wrote, “So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” This verse is frequently relied upon by pastors and church preachers to teach that they are entitled to get their living from the gospel. In fact, however, read literally, by itself, and out of context, the verse can be relied upon for a broader proposition: *anyone* who preaches the gospel has a right to get a living from the gospel, whether or not he or she is a pastor or church preacher.

It is important to read verses *in context*. In this regard, 1 Cor. 9:14 is part of 1 Cor. 9:1-23, and, as shown below, in 1 Cor. 9:1-23, Paul is *focusing* on *apostolic* rights as part of his defense of his *apostleship*. Paul is *not*, in those verses, focusing on any right of elders or church preachers, or Christians in general, to preach and live of the gospel. Thus, only when 1 Cor. 9:14 is read *broadly, i.e., beyond the focus of its context*, can that verse support an argument that elders and church preachers have a right to live of the gospel.

1 Cor. 9:14 is part of 1 Cor. 9:1-23, in which Paul *defends his apostleship*. Thus, the chapter begins, “(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? (2) 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. (3) My *defense* to those who examine me is this: . . .” (Italics added.)

What follows the above verses is a defense of Paul’s apostleship. Specifically, 1 Cor. 9:14 follows a nearly relentless series of rhetorical questions (from 1 Cor. 9:4 to 1 Cor. 9:13) in which Paul defends his *apostleship*. Accordingly, that

⁴⁵ In this section (section III.B.), Scriptural references are to the NASB, unless otherwise indicated.

defense contains numerous references to apostles or apostolic activity. Thus, at verse 4, he referred to his right to eat and drink, something that apostles and missionaries did at Christians' expense. (See fn. 25.) At verse 5, Paul referred to "the rest of the apostles"⁴⁶ and Cephas (Peter), an apostle. At verse 6, Paul referred to himself and Barnabas. Barnabas, like Paul, was an apostle. (Acts 14:14.)

Moreover, the analogies Paul gave at verse 7 describe the work of an apostle: the soldier for the Lord waging spiritual warfare in foreign lands that have not yet heard the gospel; the husbandman who does the initial work of planting a spiritual vineyard (see 1 Cor. 3:6 (KJV), where Paul says, "*I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase*) and the shepherd who feeds the spiritual flock.⁴⁷

Likewise, at verses 9-12, Paul's references to the ox treading out corn, and his references to plowing, sowing, and threshing were metaphors for the planting activities of an apostle.

As for 1 Cor. 9:14 *by itself*, if Paul is there teaching that elders and church preachers have a right to live of the gospel, such a reading of the verse is in fact too narrow, since, as we have seen, the verse may read to teach that *anyone* who proclaims the gospel has that right, whether or not they are "officially" "elders" or "church preachers."

Paul, even after 1 Cor. 9:14, continues his defense of his apostleship. At verse 15, Paul teaches that he did not use the right to live of the gospel, a right he referred to at 1 Cor. 9:14. Thus, Paul obviously believed that, as an apostle, he had that right.

Finally, as we have seen, at 1 Cor. 9:18-22, Paul teaches that he became a slave to men by choice in order that he would "win the more" people to Christ, and use "all means" to "save some"-- the work of an apostle.

On the other hand, in 1 Cor. 9:1-23, there is no reference to the term "pastor" or "elder." Moreover, there is no reference in those verses to church preachers, unless it is found in 1 Cor. 9:14 itself, the very verse at issue, in the phrase "those who proclaim the gospel . . ." But that phrase, as we have seen, could refer literally to anyone preaching the gospel. Further, *all* of Paul's questions in 1 Cor.

⁴⁶ At verse 5, Paul also referred to "the brothers of the Lord," which would have included James, an apostle and half-brother of the Lord. (Gal. 1:19.)

⁴⁷ That the shepherd analogy can apply to a pastor does not change the facts that (1) it applies to apostles, and (2) the focus of 1 Cor. 9:1-23 is not on pastors, elders, or church preachers.

9:4-13 support the idea that apostles have rights, but it is not clear that all of those questions (particularly those pertaining to the soldier and planter in 1 Cor. 9:7) support the idea that elders and church preachers have rights.

1 Cor. 9:14 is part of 1 Cor. 9:1-23, and, in those verses, Paul is focusing on apostolic rights as part of his defense of his apostleship.⁴⁸ Thus, one commentator observes that the Corinthians were

“ . . . calling into question [Paul’s] apostolic authority[,]” and “ . . . his failure to accept material support is being played off against him, calling into question his apostleship itself”⁴⁹

In sum, 1 Cor. 9:14 is part of 1 Cor. 9:1-23, in which Paul focuses on apostolic rights as part of his defense of his apostleship. Only when 1 Cor. 9:14 is read broadly, beyond its context, can that verse support an argument that Paul is there focusing on elders and church preachers, and teaching that they have a right to live of the gospel.

⁴⁸ At 1 Cor. 9:14 (KJV), Paul says that “. . . the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel[.]” or, in the NASB, “. . . the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” The terms “ordained” (KJV) and “directed” (NASB) are in the past tense, because they translate the Greek word “dietakzen” (Gk.: “διεταξεν” (Berry, p. 451). The word “dietakzen” is in the Greek aorist indicative (Friberg and Friberg, p. 528), the aorist being a tense which (in the indicative mood) generally indicates past action. (Dana and Mantey, pp. 193-194; Black, p. 45, but see p. 50, where Black notes, “even in the indicative mood the aorist does not *always* refer to past time.” (Italics added.) Thus, Paul does not expressly say at 1 Cor. 9:14 that the Lord was, *at the time Paul was writing*, directing that those who preach the gospel were to live of the gospel, but that the Lord had so directed *in the past*. One commentator observes, “Paul is here referring to the saying of Jesus that appears in Luke 10:7 [fn. omitted] (‘the worker deserves his wages’; cf. Matt. 10:10), spoken originally in the context of his sending out the 72 (the 12 in Matthew’s Gospel). [Fn. omitted.]” (Fee, p. 413.) To the same effect is Alford, II, p. 546. (Fee, by referring to the “72,” apparently refers to the fact that Luke 10:1, in some Greek manuscripts, refers to 72 persons, not 70. Berry, p. 185.)

The above cited verses in Luke and Matthew pertain to apostles and the 70 missionaries, not to elders or church preachers. At Luke 10:7 (KJV), Jesus, addressing the 70, said, “And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.” At Matthew 10:9-10 (KJV), Jesus, addressing the 12 apostles, said, “(9) Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, (10) nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.” The above suggests that, at 1 Cor. 9:14, Paul was teaching that, just as the Lord directed the 12 apostles and the 70 to live of the gospel, so too, *apostles* in Paul’s day had a right to live of the gospel. In any event, elders or church preachers are not in focus in Lk. 10:7 or Matthew 10:9-10, and this provides evidence that they are not in focus at 1 Cor. 9:14.

⁴⁹ Fee, p. 393.

C. Even Assuming 1 Cor. 9:14 Teaches That Elders And Church Preachers Have A Right To Live Of The Gospel, Paul Is Teaching That The Right Is Not To Be Exercised.

As we have seen, only when 1 Cor. 9:14⁵⁰ is read broadly, beyond its context, does that verse support an argument that Paul is focusing on elders and church preachers and teaching that they have a right to live of the gospel. Nonetheless, there are many today who take what Paul said at 1 Cor. 9:14 concerning his *apostolic* rights and read it broadly to apply to elders and church preachers, i.e., just as Paul the apostle had a right to live of the gospel, so too elders and church preachers have a right to live of the gospel. In this regard, three points must be observed.

1. Paul Commanded The Corinthians To “Imitate” Him As He Imitated Christ, And Paul Did Not Exercise His Apostolic Right To Live Of The Gospel.

First, we cannot selectively choose from the apostle Paul’s teaching what we will and will not apply to elders and church preachers. Even assuming for the sake of argument that we apply, to elders and church preachers, Paul’s teaching at 1 Cor. 9:14 concerning his *apostolic right* to live of the gospel, we must also apply, to elders and church preachers, Paul’s teaching concerning *apostolic responsibilities*.

As previously discussed, at 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1, Paul reminded the Corinthians that, as he taught in 1 Cor. 9:1-23, he did not exercise his apostolic right to live of the gospel, and he refrained from exercising that right that he might please “all men” and “save” some. Paul also reminded the Corinthians that, as he taught in 1 Cor. 8, they were not to exercise their right to eat things offered to idols if the exercise of that right would offend weak Christians. He exhorted the Corinthians at 1 Cor. 11:1 to “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” This included imitating Paul in the matter of refraining from exercising their right to eat things offered to idols if the exercise would offend weak Christians.

At 1 Cor. 9:1-23, and 1 Cor. 9:14 in particular, Paul was not focusing on whether elders or church preachers have a right to live of the gospel. But if we assume for sake of argument that, at those verses, Paul was teaching that elders and church preachers had a right to live of the gospel, Paul’s summarizing command at 1 Cor. 11:1, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” would extend to this matter as well, and not merely to the eating of things offered to idols. That is, *elders and church preachers would be required by 1 Cor. 11:1 to imitate Paul and not exercise their right to live of the gospel*. Those who extend

⁵⁰ In this section (section III.C.), Scriptural references are to the NASB.

Paul's discussion of apostolic *rights* at 1 Cor. 9:1-23 to elders and church preachers, must also extend Paul's discussion of apostolic *responsibilities* at 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1 to elders and church preachers.

2. *Exercising The Right To Live Of The Gospel Would Conflict With Paul's Other Commands.*

Moreover, even if we assume that elders and church preachers have a right to live of the gospel, there is a second reason why they should not exercise any such right--the exercise would conflict with other commands of Paul. First, if, at 1 Cor. 9:14, Paul were teaching that elders and church preachers were to live of the gospel, that teaching would conflict with Acts 20:35 where, as we previously have discussed, Paul *commanded* the elders at Ephesus to work. Second, as we have seen, at 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17, Paul *commanded* Christians to work, and those verses made *no exception* for Christians who are elders or church preachers.

3. *Paul's Reasons For Not Exercising His Rights Are No Less Compelling Today.*

Again, even assuming that elders and church preachers have a right to live of the gospel, there is a third reason why they should not exercise any such right. Just as what Paul did or did not do with respect to the issue of exercising his right to live of the gospel impacted the eternal future of unbelievers in his day, so too what elders and church preachers do or not do with respect to that issue impacts the eternal future of unbelievers today.

Thus, if we merely focus on the *fact* that Paul chose not to exercise his right to live of the gospel, we might be free to treat Paul's choice as merely a personal one, and to disregard it as an example to be followed today. But what Paul wrote he wrote under the inspiration of God. (2 Tim. 3:16.) And if we focus on *why* he made that choice, we are forced to consider his compelling *reasons*, written under inspiration, for that choice, reasons which led Paul to teach, under inspiration, that he would rather die than exercise his rights. In short, even if elders and church preachers have a right to live of the gospel, Paul's reasons for not exercising that right—causing no hindrance to the gospel, winning more people to Christ, “sav[ing]” people, doing “all things for the sake of the gospel,” and giving “no offense”—are just as compelling against the exercise of any such right today.⁵¹

⁵¹ Paul frequently preached in regions which had never heard the gospel (Rom. 15:20-21), whereas that is not true of church preachers today, at least those in the West. But that fact does not mean that it was more important for Paul than it was for church preachers today to set an unimpeachable standard and not exercise any right they have to live of the gospel. First, regions are not hindered from believing the gospel

IV. Elders Can Receive Financial Support.

A. The Example Of Paul's Life: Paul Received Support To Take Care Of His Needs.

During Paul's third missionary journey, he wrote 2 Corinthians. In 2 Cor. 11: 7-14, Paul explained to the Corinthians that *he was supported by other churches* (although he did not take support from the church in Corinth, in part to expose false apostles there who were teaching false doctrine and taking Christians' money). At those verses (KJV), Paul said:

“(7) Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? (8) *I robbed other churches, taking wages of them*, to do you service. (9) And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: *for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied*: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself. (10) As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia. (11) Wherefore? Because I love you not? God knoweth. (12) But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. (13) For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.”

Here, Paul graphically described the extent to which he was willing to go to avoid taking support from the Corinthians. He says that he took “*wages*”⁵² *from other churches* and, instead of using those wages to serve those churches, he used it to serve the Corinthians. Paul described this as robbing the other churches. But our point in quoting verse 8 is to show that Paul said that he received support from churches. Moreover, in verse 9, he tells the Corinthians that it was the Macedonian Christians who supplied his needs when he was in Corinth.

Later, at 2 Cor. 12:13 (KJV), Paul wrote:

“For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong.”

--people are--and just as exercising a right to live of the gospel could hinder unbelievers in Paul's day, the exercise of that right can hinder unbelievers today. Second, elders and church preachers today should not want to set for themselves a standard that is less than unimpeachable.

⁵² The Greek word translated “wages” is “opssonion” (Gk.: “οψωνιον”; Berry, p. 484.) The word refers to “*ration-(money)* paid to a soldier, then *pay, wages* The more general [meaning] *provisions* may fit . . . all [New Testament] occurrences . . . [of the word].” (BAGD, p. 602, italics in the original.)

This verse teaches that Paul was not burdensome to the Corinthian church, but implies he *was* “burdensome” to churches other than the Corinthian church, that is, he received support from churches other than the Corinthian church.

Paul’s epistle to the Philippians demonstrates that Paul received financial support from others. At Php. 4:10-18 (NASB), Paul, commending the Philippians not only for their past giving to him, but for a gift he recently had received from them through a Christian, said:

“(10) But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last *you have revived your concern for me*; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. (11) Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. (12) I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. (13) I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (14) Nevertheless, *you have done well to share with me in my affliction*. (15) And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, *no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone*; (16) *for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs*. (17) Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. (18) But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; *I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.*”⁵³

⁵³ As Paul reveals, the Philippian church had a history of supporting Paul. And that history reveals that Paul accepted not only financial support but, at the beginning of his second missionary journey, support in the way of lodging. Paul’s first stop during his second missionary journey was the city of Philippi. There he converted a Philippian businesswoman, Lydia, to the gospel. (Acts 16:11-15.) She supported Paul and those who were with him by providing for them a place to stay. Thus, Luke, who was with Paul at the time, recorded concerning Lydia at Acts 16:15: “. . . when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”

Normally, however, when Paul entered a city and preached the gospel, he worked for an income (and/or as part of an exchange) while founding a church there. (1 Thess. 2:9-10, 2 Thess. 3:6-8 (Thessalonica); Acts 18:1-3; 2 Cor. 11:9 (Corinth); 1 Cor. 4:12 (Ephesus).) But after he founded churches and left to plant churches in new regions, he received support in the new regions from the churches he previously had founded. Thus, Paul received money from the Macedonian Christians and other churches when he was in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8-9), and received gifts from the Philippians after he left Macedonia (Php. 4:15-16) and later while he was in jail in Rome (Php. 1:7, 13-16; 4:22). The Corinthian church was an exception; he did not take support from them while he was with them, or after he founded their church and left. Of the Corinthians Paul said, “. . . I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.” (2 Cor. 11:9.) Indeed, with the Corinthians, Paul avoided being present when money was collected, even when the collection was not for Paul, but for the relief of another church. (1 Cor. 16:1-3.) Thus, Paul preached the gospel “without charge,” and never preached and collected money for himself from those to whom he had just preached, but, after he left a church he had founded and went to new regions, he would accept gifts from the church he had left (except in the case of the Corinthian church).

Importantly, it should be noted that Paul did not say that he received gifts to take care of *luxuries*, but that the Philippians repeatedly sent him gifts for his “*needs*.” (Php. 4:16.)

It is noteworthy that other Scriptures, not just Paul’s epistles, make clear that it was permissible for missionary brethren to accept financial support. Again, the apostle John said at 3 John 1:5-8 (NASB),

“(5) Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; (6) and they bear witness to your love before the church; and *you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.* (7) For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. (8) *Therefore we ought to support such men,* so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.”

(Italics added.)

B. Paul Taught That Elders And Those Teaching The Word Can Receive Support.

1. *Gal. 6:6.*

At Gal. 6:6 (KJV), Paul wrote, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.” We have discussed this verse at length in the essay, *Christian Giving In Paul’s Epistle To The Galatians*. As we note there, Gal. 6:6, read in context, teaches that Christians should give good things, including money, to those who are teaching the Word of God. This obviously includes pastors, elders, and church preachers who are teaching the Word.

2. *1 Tim. 5:17-18.*

In accord is 1 Tim. 5:17-18 (KJV), where Paul said,

“17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. 18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.”

At 1 Tim. 5:17, Paul teaches that elders that rule well are to be counted “worthy of double honour[.]” On the other hand, at Acts 20:35 (NASB), as we have seen, Paul taught the Ephesian elders that “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak” We have seen that

Paul taught Christians at 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17, to work, and made no exception for elders and church preachers.

God is not “the author of confusion” (1 Cor. 14:33, KJV), thus, the above Scriptures do not conflict but must be harmonized. It is no answer to ignore Acts 20:35, 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17, and focus on 1 Tim. 5:17, any more than it is an answer to focus on the first set of verses and ignore 1 Tim. 5:17. They must all be treated as the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16) and must be harmonized. They can be harmonized if one acknowledges simply that elders are to (1) work for an income and/or as part of an exchange, *and* (2) receive double honor. That is, elders can (1) work for an income (and/or as part of an exchange) doing work *other* than preaching or fulfilling eldership responsibilities, *and* (2) rule well as elders and receive double honor. This is similar to Paul’s example: he worked, but also received gifts. Suffice it to note that 1 Tim. 5:17 does *not* expressly negate Acts 20:35. That is, 1 Tim. 5:17 does *not* say, e.g., “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine, *and let them not work* to help the weak.”

Paul says at 1 Tim. 5:17 that elders that rule well are to be counted worthy of double honor. He does not, in the verse, expressly state the sense in which the honor is to be “double.” But the phrase “double honour” does *not* compel the conclusion that the honor *is to be of such an amount, or is to be to such an extent*, that elders do not have to work as Paul taught them to at Acts 20:35, 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17.

The word “honour” is a translation of a form of the Greek word “time” (Gk.: “τιμη,” pronounced ti-may).⁵⁴ At 1 Tim. 5:17, it can mean “respect,” but it can also mean “honorarium, compensation.”⁵⁵ Thus, another work observes that “τιμη” means:

“*compensation* given for special service, with the *implication* that this is a way by which *honor or respect* may be shown – “*compensation, pay, honorarium.*” . . . “the elders who do good work as leaders should be considered worthy of receiving double *compensation*, especially those who work hard at preaching” 1 Tm. 5:17. . . . in 1 Tm. 5:17 it is also possible to understand τιμη in the sense of . . . “*honor, respect*” . . . , and therefore one may speak of the elders as “receiving double honor.””⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Wigram and Winter, p. 732.

⁵⁵ BAGD, pp. 817-818.

⁵⁶ Louw and Nida, p. 576, § 57.167, italics added.

Thus, “τιμη” at 1 Tim. 5:17 can be translated “honorarium,” “honor,” or “compensation.” One can, for example, work for an income (or as part of an exchange) at tentmaking, and, at the same time, receive an honorarium for tasks one performs as an elder. This is equally true if “τιμη” is translated “honor” or “compensation.” The fact that one is *compensated* for labor which one performs as an elder does not mean that the compensation is to be *to such an extent* that it relieves the elder of the elder’s responsibility to *work* as Paul taught at Acts 20:35. We may not simply throw away what Paul taught at Acts 20:35 (or for that matter, at 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17) simply because Paul taught at 1 Tim. 5:17 that elders are to receive double compensation or honoraria.

1 Tim. 5:18 begins with the word “[f]or,” because it explains 1 Tim. 5:17. Paul’s explanation at 1 Tim. 5:18 cites two Scriptures: “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn[.]” (see Deut. 25:4) and “The labourer is worthy of his reward.” (See Lk. 10:7.) But neither Scripture, as an explanation, compels the conclusion that the “double honour” *is to be of such an amount, or is to be to such an extent*, that elders do not have to work as Paul taught them to at Acts 20:35, 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17.

Paul’s quotation of “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn[.]” a reference to Deut. 25:4, does not mean that elders are not to work for an income and/or as part of an exchange. Paul’s quotation of “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn[.]” is illuminated by his discussion of that verse at 1 Cor. 9:9-10. At 1 Cor. 9:10 (NASB), Paul taught that Deut. 25:4 was written for apostles’ sake “because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.” Thus, as applicable here, Deut. 25:4 is teaching that elders have a right to labor “in hope,” and receive benefits from those for whom they labor. But that fact does not require us to conclude that the benefit *is to be of such an amount, or is to be to such an extent*, that elders do not have to work as Paul taught them to at Acts 20:35, 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17.

Similarly, Paul’s quotation of “The labourer is worthy of his reward[.]” a reference to Lk. 10:7, does not mean that elders are not to work for an income and/or as part of an exchange. The word “reward” (NASB) (KJV: “wages”) at 1 Tim. 5:18 is a translation of a form of the Greek word “misthos” (Gk.: “μισθος”).⁵⁷ It means “pay, wages.”⁵⁸ But again, that fact does not compel the

⁵⁷ Wigram and Winter, p. 502 .

⁵⁸ BAGD, p. 523. (Italics omitted.) Of the 29 times that the word “misthos” or a form thereof is used in the KJV, it is translated “reward” 24 times, including at 1 Tim. 5:18. (Wigram and Winter, p. 502.) Whether “misthos” is translated “wages” or “reward,” Paul is teaching that the laborer is worthy of same, but the word “wages” suggests an agreement between parties that the word “reward” need not.

conclusion that the “pay” or “wages” *is to be of such an amount, or is to be to such an extent*, that elders do not have to work as Paul taught them to at Acts 20:35, 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-10, and 1 Cor. 4:11-17.⁵⁹

1 Tim. 5:17-18 no more addresses whether elders are to work than Acts 20:35 addresses whether elders who rule well are to receive double honor. However, both verses teach a truth, and may be harmonized by teaching both truths. There is no persuasive reason to accept one verse but reject the other. Just as Paul worked but received gifts, elders are to work, but those who rule well are to receive double honor.

3. 1 Tim. 3:2-3; Titus 1:7.

Paul wrote at 1 Tim. 3:2-3 (NASB), that one of the requirements of an overseer (KJV: bishop) is that the overseer must be “free from the love of money.” All elders are overseers,⁶⁰ therefore elders must be free from the love of money. Similarly, at Titus 1:7 (NASB), Paul teaches that an overseer (KJV: bishop) must “not be fond of sordid gain[.]” (KJV: “not given to filthy lucre.”) These injunctions would be superfluous if elders were categorically barred from receiving financial support, but the injunctions make sense if Paul contemplates that elders will receive money as financial support, and is requiring that they be free from the *love of*, or *fondness* for, the money they will receive.

V. Conclusion

As mentioned, a balanced presentation on the subject of Christian giving requires that we consider what the Scriptures tell church leadership about how they should be financially supported. This essay has attempted to demonstrate three things. First, elders (including pastors) and church preachers must work for an income and/or as part of an exchange. Second, 1 Cor. 9:14, which says, “. . . the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel[.]” cannot, when read in context, be relied upon to teach that elders who preach, or church preachers, are to live of the gospel. Third, elders can receive financial support to take care of their needs.

If our discussion of the above three points is correct, our discussion constitutes a Scriptural challenge to the many otherwise faithful pastors who do not work for an income and instead rely on church giving for their livelihood.

⁵⁹ Of course, if 1 Tim. 5:17-18 teach that elders who rule well have a right to double honor, nothing in those verses precludes such elders from choosing not to exercise that right.

⁶⁰ In Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian “elders” (Acts 20:17), Paul called them “overseers.” (Acts 20:28.)

In fact, the practice of elders and church preachers living of the gospel and not working for an income (and/or as part of an exchange) is an institutionalized part of the traditional Western church. Pastors who do not work can doubtless argue, e.g., that by not working and instead living of the gospel, they are free to take care of various alleged pastoral responsibilities and tasks. However, Paul could have made a similar argument far more effectively for himself to support a claim that he should exercise his right to live of the gospel, and could have made a similar argument as to elders and church preachers as well. Instead, Paul made no such arguments and, we have seen, his teaching is to the contrary.

Indeed, if the Scriptures teach that pastors must work and not live of the gospel, and if that teaching reduces the time that pastors otherwise might have to attend to alleged pastoral responsibilities, the tail should not be permitted to wag the dog. Perhaps the issue of what a pastor's responsibilities are to the flock must be Biblically reexamined, along with whether more responsibilities are Biblically to be shared with the flock.

Moreover, pastors and elders who continue to live of the gospel will always face an additional problem that could be avoided if they rose to the Scriptural challenge of working. Paul taught that nothing should be done "by partiality." (1 Tim. 5:21.) To the extent pastors and elders rely on the gospel for their livelihood, they expose themselves to the risk of being partial (and to the risk of being perceived as partial) in their judgments concerning doctrine and practice. This is true since such judgments will frequently affect and even offend persons who provide for the income of the pastors and elders.

But our discussion does not affect faithful pastors only. Instead, our discussion pulls the rug from under dishonest elders, church preachers, and pastors who manipulate Christians on the issue of giving. This is so because the greed which is usually the source of such manipulation is given little place when elders, church preachers, and pastors must work and not live of the gospel.

The irony of contemporary Western Christianity is that, while the Scriptural norm was to be that pastors and church preachers work and not live of the gospel, the contemporary norm is that pastors and church preachers do not work and instead live of the gospel, or have as their goal a day when they do not work and instead live of the gospel. The pragmatic economic reality, then, is that, even if the Scriptures teach that elders and church preachers are to work and not live of the gospel, such a teaching may not be well received in the Western church. However, that fact should not discourage a careful examination of the Scriptures to let their evidence lead where it will--for the gospel's sake.