

THE CHRISTIAN WORKER

I Corinthians 9:1-14

Everywhere the Apostle Paul went his steps were dogged by legalistic men who hated the doctrine of grace and who sought in every way possible to shake the confidence of his converts. His commission had been called in question, and they denied that he was a true apostle. In order to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ in an official sense, it was necessary that one should have seen the Lord and have been commissioned by Him. More than that, the working of miracles should be manifested in him. These enemies of Paul intimated that he could not be a true apostle, for he had not been connected with the testimony when the Lord was here on earth. They said that he did not work the signs of an apostle nor have a true commission.

I. His Privilege. 9:1-6.

The privileges of the Christian worker are neither less nor different than the privileges of the Christian disciple. The Christian worker is not required by God to live in some segregated class removed from the common joys and associations of life. As Paul points out here, he is entitled to all the social and family privileges that the common disciples are.

1. His identity. 9:1-3.

Paul was an apostolic worker. He occupied an exalted position, but, no matter how high the place, it had an origin common to all Christian workers and disciples. It began with a factual and actual experience of Christ.

Certainly Paul had seen the Lord. He saw Him in the glory that day when he was thrown to the ground on the Damascus road and beheld the risen Saviour seated on the throne of God. It wrought the miracle of a great change in him. It brought him from religion into regeneration. This was the beginning of a chain of divine providences that set Paul in a place of large usefulness. With the exception of our Lord Jesus Christ, no one has ever had so great and wide an influence in the world as Paul, but the measure of his influence was the measure of his experience. He had "seen Jesus Christ our Lord."

That was the time when he received his commission, for the Lord said, "But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:16-18). That was the time he saw the Lord, and it was then that he received his commission.

Paul's profession was supported by the production of his life. The evidence that he was a truly God-sent servant was found in this, that wherever he went the Holy Spirit confirmed the message that he delivered, convicted men of their sin, led them to definite faith in Christ, and gave them the assurance of forgiveness and justification. This was done in order that afterwards by a new life they might demonstrate the reality of the work that had taken place in their souls. Paul said, "Are not ye my work in the Lord?" "Look at yourselves. Who brought you to Christ? To whom are you indebted under God for the knowledge of His grace?" What they were in position and privilege was a guarantee of his apostleship. They were his work in the Lord.

Here are two infallible tests of an authentic Christian worker--faith and fruit. Upon these matters Paul was both dogmatic and positive. He knew what he was and declared it. He knew what he believed and proclaimed it. The world has little use for people without convictions. When a terrible disease invades your home, you do not call a physician who is open-minded about the matter. You do not want to send your children to a school where the teachers are open-minded about the multiplication table. There is a so-called open-mindedness abroad in our day which is, in fact, no-mindedness. Those who believe everything do not, in fact, believe anything. If everything is right, then nothing is wrong.

Paul's claim rested on an experience. He had not merely read a book or espoused a cause. He had passed through an experience. After all, that is what Christianity is--an experience. If you haven't had an experience, you haven't had anything. Life has a definition, but it is an experience. If you had not been born, you could not live. Love has a definition, but it is an experience. Likewise Christianity has a definition, but it is an experience. If you have not been born again, you cannot know what the new birth is. Whatever you do, be sure to balance faith with fruit and prove your faith by your works.

2. His liberty. 9:4-6.

Evidently there were some who were attempting to confine the worker into some narrow sphere of social and family life. This is apparent by what Paul said in verse three, "Mine answer to them that do examine me is this." Paul forthwith defends his right as a Christian worker to the same privileges and joys as other believers. He taught that it is quite right and proper that the Lord's servants should be supported by His churches. Paul claimed the right to remuneration for spiritual service. He dealt with his right to maintenance by the church, the right which he had to expect the church to care for him in temporal affairs and the right any preacher has to expect the same. Paul also claimed the privilege of freedom from manual or mental preoccupation that he might occupy his time solely in Christian service and receive support from the church. The Lord has appointed that His servants should be cared for by those who receive benefit from the service which they render. "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."

II. His Support. 9:7-14.

The right of the Christian worker to support for his service is defended strongly.

1. By custom. 9:7.

Here is an appeal to common custom. The soldier is engaged in toil, and from that he should obtain at least the elementary reward of maintenance. The Christian minister is a soldier of the cross, so he, like any other soldier, should be supported by those in whose behalf he renders the service. As the soldier makes war with the foe, so the servant of God wages war against evil. The husbandman plants a vineyard and eats of the fruit produced therein. Has not then the apostle, who plants a church, the right to fare as well? As the husbandman plants a vineyard, so the servant of God plants a church. The shepherd who tends the flock has the right to live from the fruits of his labors. As the shepherd takes care of his flock, so a pastor looks after the spiritual welfare of those who are under his charge. The point of this verse is that workmen have a right to be rewarded for, or to share in the proceeds of, their toil. To this rule Christian ministers are no exception.

2. By law. 9:8-11.

The justice of the Christian worker's reward is proved on the grounds of legality. The law protected the oxen. The law prohibited its owner from muzzling it while it threshed the grain as it walked over it. Is God not more concerned with men than with oxen? God, Who exercised such care for the oxen on the threshing-floor, would have infinitely more concern for His human fellow-laborers entrusted by Him with a sacred office and responsibility. The fact that the unmuzzled mouths of the oxen enabled them to feed upon the produce plainly teaches that those who procure food for and present it to others ought to have a share of it themselves.

An old pastor in Connecticut declined an increase in salary for certain stated reasons. In stating to his congregation his reasons for doing so he named three: "First, because you can't afford to pay me more. Second, because my preaching isn't worth more than I presently receive. Third, because I have to collect my salary which, heretofore, has been the hardest part of my labors among you. If I have to collect an additional sum, it will kill me."

3. By precedent. 9:12.

The principle is illustrated by Paul's work at Corinth. There were others who labored after Paul left, who claimed their right and received their support. If these were sustained, Paul was entitled to priority because he had founded the church. However, he preferred to renounce his claims that no hindrance be given to such newly organized work. His rights were their responsibility. This responsibility was created automatically the moment they received his ministrations. While they were responsible to care for his needs, Paul was free to forego the privilege of thus receiving from them if he chose to do so. It so happened that in the case of this particular church he did so in order to prove to them that he was not actuated by any selfish motive.

4. By the priesthood. 9:13.

The priests who ministered in the services of the temple were supported by offerings and were allowed portions of the sacrifices in connection therewith. The elevated relation of grace to law and the gospel service to temple service required that the Christian worker be treated with as much regard for his temporal needs as the priestly worker.

5. By Jesus Christ. 9:14.

Paul here appeals to a word spoken by Christ Who declared that a "labourer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7). Nothing could be any more plain than "that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." The Christian worker's labor is not to be paid for as a wage, but recognized as a reward. It is to be given out of the fulness of gratitude rather than the compulsion of duty. It is to be thought of as a thank-offering for blessings received. That is the Bible way and it ought to be our way.