



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Text 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

1 Corinthians

“Waiving our Rights”

TRANSCRIPT

Our scripture reading is in 1 Corinthians. We’re going to look at 9:1-14, but first of all I need to make a correction in the bulletin, and the fault or the error is mine, not the church secretaries, and I didn’t even see it until I got an email last night asking, “Do you mean waving our rights or waiving our rights?” W-A-V-I-N-G or W-A-I-V-I-N-G? And I realized I had left a little letter out. And the significance of that is quite significant because if we leave it the way it is, it communicates the opposite message of what I’m going to teach this morning. It’s not taking a flag, as it were, and waving our rights around. It’s doing just the opposite. It’s letting them go. So I was a little embarrassed by that when I saw it, but then I thought there’s a lesson in this. I can turn this to my advantage because it illustrates the importance of one little letter and illustrates the importance of what our Lord said in Matthew 5:18, that “not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law until all is accomplished.”

And that’s why we at Believers Chapel and why the evangelical church when it’s sound holds to the doctrine of the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture, that every word is inspired, every word is important, every letter is important, because if one drops out, it can change the whole meaning of the text, as my title illustrates. So it’s not only an illustration of the carelessness of the preacher, but of the importance of inspiration and that doctrine. So with that introduction to our text, and giving you a little more of a sense of what it is about, we begin reading in 9:1, and this, I should say is a continuation of the lesson he began in chapter 8, where he’s explaining that you who are mature and have knowledge must out of love put aside your rights and privileges for the sake of those who are less knowledgeable and less mature.

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“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

“My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we not have a right to eat and drink? 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? Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? 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?

“I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? 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? 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*. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. 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 from the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let’s bow together in prayer. Father, we do thank You for this time together. It’s always a pleasure on a Sunday morning to see friends that we haven’t seen for the week and catch up on things, and that’s a good time of fellowship and fellowship in that sense. But real fellowship is fellowship around your Word when we open the Scriptures and we study a text and we learn what you would have us to know and we’re built up in the faith as a result of it. And that’s what we do in this hour and that’s what we seek from you in this hour. And we seek it from you because it’s your work ultimately in us. We have our responsibilities. We’re responsible to be here. We’re responsible to be faithful in our attendance at church and we’re responsible to give attention to reading the Scriptures daily and to having our time of prayer and fellowshiping with you and all of that. We’re responsible to do that, but ultimately, Lord, that will bear fruit in our lives only because you cause it to bear fruit, only because you open our eyes to the truth.

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And you do that through the work of the Spirit. And that's one of the great blessings we have in the Christian life, that we've been sealed with the Spirit of God, that He is our teacher, that He enlightens the eyes of our hearts so that we understand the things that we study, we understand the things that we read, and having come to understand them, we can then live in light of them. Now that's what we pray for our time together, that You will teach us and build us up in the faith, and enable us to make the applications to our lives and live as the apostle Paul lived. Sometimes that's living a sacrificial life, but living a life of sacrifice for others out of love for you and love for them, and a desire to do nothing to hinder the gospel but to promote it. So may we live lives like that. May that be our goal. May our goal ultimately be to live to your glory.

So Lord, we pray that you'd cultivate that desire in us and bless us and build us up in the faith this morning. We pray that for our time together this evening when we come back and remember the Lord bless our evening meeting. And we pray for the meetings during the week, that you'd bless them, the ladies ministries and the Wednesday night ministries, all the meetings that take place here or in home Bible studies. May your people be built up in the faith, and strengthen us, encourage us. We need that. We live in difficult times and some of us are struggling more than others. And we pray for them. We pray for those that are in difficulty with employment. Maybe they have work but it's very difficult. We pray for those that are without work. We pray for those that have lost their health. We pray for those that are struggling in a variety of ways.

Lord, we could go down our list of prayer requests. There are many listed there. And there are no doubt many off that list who haven't given their names, but you know their needs. You know them better than any of us. And so you know our needs better than we know our own needs. And we know this, Lord, ultimately, the trials that we have come from You. Nothing happens randomly. We don't live lives that are directed by chance. We have a sovereign God. You're in control of everything and You even bring those incidents into our lives. I pray that they'd be used in the lives of those who are in difficulty, those who are struggling, that through that they would fix their hearts on you and they would lift up their hearts in prayer and they would see Your hand in their lives and that You would bless them.

And bless all of us, some who are enjoying good health and employment, help them to understand that that's a gift from You and to be grateful and to thank You for everything we have because every moment of every day is a gift from You. And we give You praise and thanks for it. And thank You for this moment, this hour, in which we can open the Scriptures and study and we can sing hymns of praise to You. And we pray that You'd bless our time together and the time

that remains, may it be to Your glory and to our benefit. We pray these things in Christ’s name, Amen.

I think one thing Americans understand is that we have certain liberties. Our Declaration of Independence assures us of that. We’ve been created with certain unalienable rights. They are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Those are Thomas Jefferson’s words, not the Creator’s, but Americans will fight for them. They’ll fight for their liberties. Texans have done that. When William Barrett Travis wrote from the Alamo for reinforcements, he asked for help in the name of liberty and ended his letter, “victory or death.” We all admire that. Fighting for liberty. Fighting for our rights. It’s patriotic. It’s righteous. So maybe we can appreciate what happened at the church at Corinth because there were some there who were fighting for their Christian liberty and the right to pursue happiness. They were in a struggle with another group. Both were Christians but they had different degrees of understanding. Some understood their Christian liberty better than others did. Those with the understanding knew that they were free from the Mosaic law and they had a right to enjoy their freedom by eating every kind of food, even meat that had been dedicated to a pagan idol.

Paul didn’t disagree with their right to do that. Paul, in fact, was the champion of Christian liberty. He defended it. He fought for it. But he also taught that there were some things and something better than enjoying the rights of our liberty and that was edifying the lives of our brothers and sisters. And so Paul counseled the Corinthians to restrict their freedom so that it wouldn’t become a stumbling block to those who were troubled by such practices as eating idol meat. Sometimes it’s not heroic to fight for our rights. Sometimes it’s nobler to waive them out of love for others and the desire to build them up in the faith.

Christian liberty is a great privilege. But it is equally a great responsibility and it is never for the purpose of trampling down people. It is only for the purpose of building them up. As Paul said in 8:1, “love edifies.” We’re to be guided by knowledge but motivated by love. Love is the great virtue of the Christian life. But for some, some in Corinth, all of that was just too hard. They didn’t want to yield their freedom and maybe they even felt that it was unbiblical to do that, that they needed to fight for their rights, they needed to fight for their liberty, and that’s what they intended to do. So they needed further persuasion. Paul gives that from his own example. He didn’t quarterback from the sidelines. He always practiced what he preached and that’s what he tells them in chapter 9.

He’s asked them to give up something that they feel they are entitled to, and they were entitled to it. But as he explains, he’s given up something that he’s entitled to. Financial support for the ministry. It was a demanding sacrifice on his part. It meant that he had to work long hours in order to support himself, which made his work in the ministry all the more difficult, all the more demanding. But he did it. He did it, he said, so that he would “cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.” He didn’t want anyone to suggest that he was preaching for personal gain. The restriction he put on himself was far greater than anything he asked the Corinthians to place on themselves. But it’s what we should do to benefit people and to spread the gospel. That’s the lesson of our text, 1 Corinthians 9:1-14.

Paul begins with a defense of his apostleship. He was not one of the original 12, so his opponents frequently questioned his authenticity as a real apostle. So he frequently had to defend himself. He had to defend his authority for what he taught. But here his defense is not so much to convince people that he was an apostle as to establish the fact that he has a right to all that he had willingly given up. In other words, he was reminding them that he was an apostle in order to explain what the rights were that he had waived and to show that he had given up a lot for the sake of others.

In verse 1, Paul asks four questions. Each one expects the answer yes. The first two refer to Christian liberty. “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle?” The idea is that he’s not only relinquished his general rights as a Christian but even more his rights as an apostle. And to reinforce his authority as an apostle, he asks a third and fourth question. “Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?” One of the requirements for being an apostle was seeing the resurrected Jesus. That’s also stated in Acts 1:21-22, when the apostles were selecting a replacement for Judas, Peter said it was necessary that they choose from among men who had witnessed the Lord’s resurrection, had seen Him physically resurrected. Paul was that. He had met Christ on the Damascus road. He didn’t see Him in a dream. He didn’t see Him in a vision. He really saw the glorified Christ in a bright light and he talked to Him. He conversed with Him.

Now that’s very important. The apostles are the foundation of the church according to Ephesians 2:20. They have authority. Now there are people today who claim to be apostles. So this is a verse that has some relationship to things that are going on in contemporary Christianity. It’s very serious because if they are, in fact, apostles, then we need to listen to them. Of course, their claim is hardly credible according to this. They would have to have seen the resurrected Christ, and they have not. Now some people can claim to have seen Him in a vision or in a dream, but Paul actually saw Christ and there were witnesses with him, men who saw the light and they

heard the voice. They didn’t know the meaning of it. The voice, they thought, was thunder, but they heard a sound that they couldn’t interpret. It wasn’t audible to them, and they saw the bright light, but they didn’t see Christ in it. Nevertheless, they saw the phenomenon. It was objective. It was real. It was historical. It was an event. It was not some subjective dream or vision that Paul had. There was confirming evidence, confirming witnesses there.

But not only that, people who claimed to be apostles have to do the deeds and the miracles of the apostles, and that’s what Paul refers to in his fourth question. The Corinthians are his work, he says. They themselves are the proof that he is the real deal. The Corinthians, of all people, had been changed, really changed. They had been converted and they had been formed into a vibrant church for all the problems that were in Corinth. This was a vibrant, vital church. Now that’s nothing short of a miracle. Of course, the new birth is always a miracle. Regeneration in the life of an individual is the greatest of all the miracles. It’s bringing the dead to life spiritually. We are all born to this world spiritually dead. And Paul tells us that in Ephesians 2:1-2. So regeneration, the rebirth, the new birth in anyone’s life is the greatest of miracles. And that happened in Corinth through Paul’s work.

Now, you’ll notice he calls them his “work in the Lord,” meaning it was what he did in the sphere and in the power of the Lord. Paul took no credit personally for the change in these people. It was God’s doing. God did it in and through Paul’s ministry, but it was God’s work. He did it. So his claim about them is not a boast about himself. He wasn’t saying he had some personal power that brought about this change. It was his work, his effort, but it was completely the work of God in him and through him. And so his statement here is completely humble. Which, again, is a characteristic of an apostle. He doesn’t take credit for what’s done, doesn’t take credit for himself and for the change in his life or the things that he produced in his ministry. An apostle always gives the glory to God. That’s what all the apostles did. That’s what Paul’s doing here.

But he does boast a little in the Corinthians in verse 2, he calls them, “the seal of his apostleship,” which referred to a seal impressed in clay or wax that was the mark of ownership. Very common in the ancient world. It was a way of showing that the contents, for example, that a merchant was shipping from one place to another, that those contents were authentic or that a document was official because it had the seal of the governor or the emperor on it.

I was in Germany a few years ago and I went one day – had a couple days off and so I went one afternoon – to the old city of Rothenburg. It’s a city that has impressive walls that tourists walk on, and also a strange museum, the crime museum. All kinds of interesting things in it, but one thing that it had that I thought was particularly interesting was a display of large medieval

seals made of wax that were stamped with intricate official images. The stamp of the governor or the prince or the emperor. And they had been attached to important state documents as a means of authentication. They had a whole collection of these, very large, interesting seals. Well, that’s what Paul was comparing the Corinthians to, to the Roman version of that. They’re very existence was like a seal. It proved his point. They authenticated his ministry. They demonstrated that he is genuine that he is an apostle.

The only way to explain the results of his teaching and preaching in wild, pagan Corinth was the power of God. It changed these people into Christians. That’s God’s work through the apostle. Based on that, he gives what he calls in verse 3, a “defense to those who were examining him.” Those of the strong, who were questioning his teaching about defending the weak. To anyone who argues for his right to eat whatever he wants, Paul shows that he has far greater rights to things that he has given up than they are to give up. He’s an apostle and in a variety of ways, he confirms that he has voluntarily given up his rights as an apostle for the sake of the gospel and that they, too, should do the same for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of the weaker brethren, for the sake of the church, to build it up and make it stronger.

Now he begins in verse 4 by reminding them of his right to eat and drink. Now, that may be a reference to his right to material support from the churches, to receive from them food and drink, to receive from the churches sustenance, to provide for him in his ministry. Now he’s about to talk about that. So that’s a possible meaning. But it could also refer to his right to eat and drink whatever he wanted, even meat offered to idols, which is the subject that he’s been addressing here in verse 8, and I think that is the point that he’s making here. But that’s still on their minds. That’s the main issue here. And in that case, he was saying that as an apostle, he had a greater right to enjoy all food and drink, greater right than any of them, but he relinquished it. He knew he was free to have a glass of wine at dinner. He encouraged moderation and he condemned drunkenness as a sin, just as he condemned gluttony as a sin.

But Paul knew his rights. He knew when he could enjoy them, and he knew when he should restrict them. And as an apostle he would say, “If my eating or drinking causes a brother to stumble, I won’t eat or drink.” But also he did use his rights – rather, I should say he didn’t use his rights as an apostle to live off the church, and he refers to that in the next verses. In verse 5, he writes of marriage and the right of an apostle to bring his wife with him on his travels in the ministry at the expense of the churches. The rest of the apostles did that. Now, Paul may have been a widower, as many think he must have been. We’ve talked about that, considered that. Well, if so, while she lived, he never passed on her expenses to the churches. He mentioned

Cephas or Peter and the Lord’s brothers, meaning his natural half brothers by Joseph and Mary, James and Jude and others. They were all married. And as an aside, that indicates that the notion of a celibate clergy is not biblical. Only those who are gifted to remain single should do that.

Paul explained that earlier. We’ve discussed that. And that’s for relatively few people. The norm is marriage. The norm in the ministry is marriage. And those who are married have a right to bring their wives with them on their long journeys, but Paul never exercised that right. He never took advantage of it. It was a fair thing to do. It was not wrong to do it. He wasn’t criticizing Cephas, Peter, or any of the others for doing it. But he deliberately did not exercise that right. In verse 6, he asks, “Do not Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?” Rather, “Do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?” He and Barnabas supported themselves in the ministry. Paul was a tent maker. Everyone in the church at Corinth knew that because when he first came to Corinth we’re told by Luke in chapter 18 at the very beginning of the chapter, that he joined with Aquila in making tents. He was there for a year and a half teaching them and supporting himself. When he went on to Ephesus, he did the same thing.

In Acts 20, he reminded the Ephesian elders of that. He has a farewell meeting with them. He’ll never see them again. He says goodbye to them. And in the course of saying farewell, goodbye to those men to whom he’d had a very significant ministry, he reviewed his life with them. He reviewed his ministry with them. And he reminded them that with his own hands he had provided for his needs, and not only for his needs, but for the needs of his associates, those who were with him. Well, who does that? It’s very unusual. It wasn’t because he didn’t have the right to work, rather the right to refrain from working. He did. Everyone does. People don’t work for free, and apostles weren’t expected to minister for free.

He confirms that in verse 7 with three examples from everyday life. “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?” Well, of course, no one does those things. No soldier in the Roman legion bought his own weapons or provided his own food. He didn’t fight for free or pay his own way. Farmers and shepherds were free to eat the fruit they grew or the milk and cheese that they produced. Everyone knows that. So an apostle certainly had a right to gain support from the flock, from those to whom he ministered. That’s obvious from normal social conventions. But Paul wasn’t basing his defense strictly upon human wisdom or human conventions, or just the way things normally are carried out.

He had an even stronger proof from God’s Word. In verse 9, he cites Deuteronomy 25:4. “it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.’” In ancient

Israel, they would harvest the wheat, then they would harness an ox, and that ox would then trample down the grain, break it loose from the stocks, and then after separating the grain from the stocks, they would winnow the wheat. They would toss it in the air and the wind would separate the wheat from the chaff. Now that’s still done in parts of the Middle East. I was in Egypt oh, many, many years ago, 30, 35 years ago. Saw fascinating things, but one thing that I thought was particularly interesting wasn’t really on the tour. It happened just off the road, out in the field there was an Egyptian peasant leading an ox that pulled a threshing sledge around in a circle, cutting grain. Just a very simple thing. Now I’m sure you see the same thing there today. Things have not changed in that particular place for millenia.

Beasts of burden still have to work hard. Now that’s the way it was in the ancient world. They would employ the ox to do that kind of work. So Moses instructed the Israelites that when they did that, they needed to take care of the ox. They needed to look after its needs and not be indifferent to it. They were to allow it to eat freely while it threshed the grain. While it walked around in that circle, it was to be allowed to eat leisurely, as it needed, as it desired. They are to take care of their animal. But then Paul adds, “God is not concerned about oxen, is He?” And the answer that that question expects is no. He’s not. Now that could possibly make Paul public enemy number one to PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. But if it does, it’s only because they’ve misinterpreted the apostle Paul.

He doesn’t mean that God is insensitive to animals or that Paul himself was. You can be sure that he wasn’t and God is not. He gives a command here to provide for the ox. It shows his concern for the ox. In Proverbs 12:10, we’re taught that “a righteous man has regard for the life of his animal.” God cares for the welfare of his creatures. He cares for the smallest of them. He’s aware when a sparrow falls from the sky. He knows everything that happens. He’s concerned about it all. But Paul’s point is that isn’t the point of the command. This really isn’t about animals, he’s saying. It’s about taking care of human beings, and the ox here is simply an illustration for that instruction.

We go back and look at that passage in Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy 25, it’s about dealing fairly with people. It’s about doing the right thing toward people. It begins with instruction on judges, that they are to judge in the courts of law of Israel fairly, righteously, rightly. They are to establish justice. And then you have this statement in verse 4 about the ox, and that’s followed by a statement about Levirate marriage, about a brother raising up children for his deceased brother. So it’s in between two statements about justice and giving help to a family. The command about the ox would seem in the face of it to be kind of arbitrary. How does that fit with anything? But it

does fit. It makes a point. It’s put there for that purpose. It is put there to make the point, in effect, that if you are to care for an ox, if you are to care for an animal and you are, you certainly should care for your countrymen and your brother. The principal from Deuteronomy 25 and what Paul is implying here is that the worker shares in the fruit of his work as the ox does. And that applies to the apostles.

He illustrates that further in verse 10, where he says that the plowman and the thresher should work in hope of sharing the crops. That’s only right. That’s only just. A farmer or laborer doesn’t work for free. If they do, they don’t work for long. They’ll become discouraged. They’ll quit because they can’t support themselves. Now that’s universally true. People expect a wage. People expect a fair wage for their work or they won’t work. At least they won’t work well. And Paul is teaching that here in regard to the church. It is to provide for its ministers. Jesus taught that, as well, that the laborer is worthy of his wages. But really, all of that is a given here. Paul is not telling the Corinthians something they didn’t know. He’s not telling us something that we don’t know. He was telling them what they did know in order to make his defense. And this is his defense. If a farmer has a right to share in his crop, if a minister has a right to expect to be maintained by a congregation, then he and Barnabas and others do, as well.

Verse 11. “If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?” If we teach you the Scriptures, he was saying, is it too much to expect support financially for doing that? No. Of course not. In fact, he says in verse 12 that he or we – he and some others, Barnabas, maybe, but he certainly had a right to their financial support, more than all others. “Do we not more?” he asks. Yes. They do. Yes, he does. When they, when those Corinthians were pagans and living in gross immorality, when they were in utter darkness, Paul came to them with the light of the gospel. Their lives were transformed. They got saved through his ministry. They were transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of light. What price do you put on that? How could they ever begin to repay Paul what they owed him? They never could. It was priceless. He calls himself back in chapter 4 their spiritual father. They had a unique relationship with Paul. So he was well within his rights to take some financial support from them.

In fact, in verses 13 and 14, he adds two more proofs for that. First, from Israel’s priestly service, and then from the Lord’s own instruction. The priests in the temple were supported by the temple. They took a portion from the altar. They had a right to that, and they had a right to be provided for by their ministry. There was a tax taken from the nation to support the Levites and the priests. So the religion of Israel taught that, but then he states that even Jesus taught it. He

directed ministers to get their living from the gospel. And Paul doesn’t cite the statement that our Lord made, so we’re not certain what he’s referring to, but probably Luke 10:7, a worker deserves his wages. “Nevertheless,” Paul says in verse 12, “we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.” And that put Paul in a difficult position materially. He worked more and had less than most people. As a result, he didn’t have a lot of stuff. And we live in an age, we live in a society, we live in a city that has lots of stuff. We all have a lot of things. You know that when you begin to move and you realize, “I’ve got to empty this closet,” or the attic. In my case, it’s the garage. It just seems to fill up. Well, we’re used to having things.

Paul had very little. Now, he didn’t dress in the most stylish toga. He didn’t wear the most comfortable sandals. He couldn’t afford them. He may have gone without food on occasion. IN fact, I know he did on occasion because he tells us in 2 Corinthians that he spent a night and a day in the deep, out there in the Mediterranean, suffering shipwreck. He certainly wasn’t enjoying lunch out there. He was deprived of much all of his life. Not because Paul was some ascetic. He was not an ascetic. He didn’t deprive himself of comfort in order to be spiritual. In fact, he enjoyed nice things when he could and when he had the opportunity. He told the Philippians that. He had learned to be content with little and he had learned to be content with much. That indicates that he’d had some nice things at some point, that there were some wealthy people that perhaps gave him a good meal every once in awhile, and he thanked God for the abundance when he got it, and the refreshment that he gave. And I suspect that he was very thankful for it because those were rare occasions for the apostle Paul. He wasn’t used to abundance. People weren’t in that day.

But particularly an apostle, the apostles lived a hard life. And Paul, of all of them in particular, lived a hard life. But he deprived himself of what he could have rightfully asked for, material support, and kept working and ministering because he didn’t want to be a hindrance to the gospel. He didn’t want that to be a hindrance to the gospel. He didn’t want to give anyone the smallest occasion to accuse him of being in the ministry for the sake of material gain or exploiting people by means of the gospel. He was very sensitive to that. Now he didn’t complain about that, didn’t complain about the sacrifices he had made. He made them gladly. He did it for the Lord. His whole life was lived to exalt Christ, to promote the gospel and to benefit God’s people. He did it out of love for those people. He did it to build them up in the faith. And that’s what love does. And that’s what’s to motivate us. Love is selfless. It puts others ahead of self. And Paul was asking the strong in Corinth, the ones with knowledge, to do that. You see, that’s the point that

Paul is making here. There are a number of lessons that we can draw from this passage about the ministry and financial support, all of that.

That's not really Paul's point. He isn't saying, "I have a right to be supported materially," because that's the lesson he wants to teach about support in the ministry. He's saying all of that to make his defense, to explain his point, that he has a right to all of that, but he deliberately gave it up for the benefit of others. He deliberately gave it up out of love for others. That's his point, and that's his lesson, and that's what he's encouraging here. He wasn't asking these people to do something that he hadn't done. Paul was no hypocritical self-indulgent preacher. He'd given up far more than he was asking the Corinthians to surrender. He was living the life that he was calling them to live.

Liberty is a great blessing and privilege. It's worth fighting for, political liberty is worth fighting for. It's worth dying for. We have a wonderful history in our country of men, women, people who have done that. Liberty gives us the opportunity to grow as Christians, to develop in our relationship with Christ and to enjoy our Christian liberty, and that liberty is worth fighting for. That liberty is worth dying for. But Christian liberty is never to be enjoyed at the expense of Christian love. Love should guide the use of our liberty. We are free to eat and drink, and we are free not to eat and drink. Whether we eat or drink or abstain, we should do it for the right reasons and be willing to sacrifice our rights if someone's conscience would be hurt by the use of our rights and liberties. That's what Paul did. He sacrificed himself for others. And that's what he's calling upon these Corinthians to do, and that's what he's instructing us to do, to put others ahead of ourselves, to seek their benefit at our own expense. Food and drink or whatever is not worth what it would cost someone else. It's not worth our testimony. It's not worth tarnishing the name of Christ. We're to make sacrifices for others.

And that's a small thing for us to do, isn't it? In light of what Christ has done for us? Really, that's the more important point, the sacrifice that Christ made. He emptied himself, Paul wrote in Philippians 2. The Son of God, the eternal Son of God, the One who created all of this, and all of us, and in fact, as Paul tells us elsewhere in Colossians chapter 1, holds us all together. Created us and sustains us, that One humbled Himself, emptied Himself by becoming a servant and a sacrifice for us. He did it so that all who believe in Him would be forgiven and have eternal life, so that they would become sons of God and have real freedom. And we have all of that through faith alone. Not through any work that we do. He's done it all. When He went to the cross, He bore the sins of His people. He bore the wrath of God. He exhausted God's wrath there.

He finished the work and He declared that at the end of it all, “It is finished.” And what He meant by that is there's nothing more that needs to be done.

There's not a thing that you and I could add to His work. It's complete. It's finished. All one must do is recognize his or her need and receive the gift of life that's in Jesus Christ. Now that's a great sacrifice and that's a great blessing. So if you're here without Christ, if you've not believed in Him and you want that life, you want eternal life, look to Him. Believe in Him. Trust in Him. The moment you do that, you are forgiven forever and you are adopted into the family of God and you have real freedom, real liberty. And then, by God's grace, you'll use it wisely. You'll enjoy it at the right times, and you'll refrain from it, you'll waive your rights at the right time. May God give us the wisdom to do that and the desire to do it and to serve Him who has served us so well and so sacrificially. Let's pray.

Father, we do pray that You would make us men and women who make sacrifices, not grudgingly. Paul made great sacrifices, but not grudgingly, willingly, gladly. Nothing in this world, meat, or drink, or clothing, or whatever, nothing was so important to him as honoring You and blessing others, helping the weak. So he gladly made sacrifices. Help us to be of that mind. Give us great knowledge. Knowledge is essential. Knowing Your Word, understanding the great doctrines in the faith, that is crucial, essential. But our knowledge must be governed by love. We must be motivated in all we do, in the way we act upon our knowledge by loving the brethren. Help us to have that love, the love that You have for us, may we have it for one another. Cultivate that in us, Father, that we would serve You faithfully. We thank You for your love for us and the sacrifice that You made for us. And it's in Christ's name we pray, Amen.