

# First Corinthians

VERSE-BY-VERSE

1st Corinthians

59 A.D.  
Date of Writing

Ephesus  
Place of Writing

Although the Corinthian church had fallen into hard times in their behavior, they were still saved because of the grace of Jesus Christ. Paul is laying out his case that as an apostle, he has the right to freedom from the Law, but he is not going to use his freedom to cause someone with a weak conscience to fall into guilt. His goal is to teach this church about their freedom in Christ and that those who believe are no longer bound to the Law, but are set free. The Church was to follow his pattern, and so too are we (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 1:15,16)

## Six Questions Paul Answers

1. What about **marriage**? (Chapter 7).
2. What about Christian **liberty**? (Chapter 8-10).
3. What about Church **conduct**? (Chapter 11).
4. What about spiritual **gifts**? (Chapters 12-14).
5. What about the **Resurrection**? (Chapter 15).
6. What about the **collection**? (Chapter 16).

## Chapter 9:4-6 | Paul Defends His Rights as an Apostle to Give Up His Freedoms

Verse 4, 5–

**-Have we not power to eat and to drink?** Free from the dietary restrictions of the Law of Moses.

**-Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife...?** There must have been some criticism of some of Paul's team bringing women with them. NKJV says a *believing wife*. The word **sister** is the Greek word adelphi which could mean a sister in Christ, but it is also used as an actual blood related sister (as in Romans 16:15). The context can allow for either. He could mean "we have the freedom to marry" like some of the other **apostles** apparently had done, and many of the **brethren** (brothers), and even **Cephas**, who is most likely Peter (although it's possible there is another Cephas. If Peter, he was married. See Matthew 8:14).

Verse 6–

**-Or I only and Barnabas.** Barnabas appears out of nowhere in this verse so the Corinthians evidently knew who he was. It is the only time his name is mentioned in either of the Corinthian letters.

### Flashback | Who is Barnabas?

We first see Barnabas in the Bible in Acts 4:36. His real name was Joses, but was given the surname Barnabas which means Son of consolation. This surname was given to him by the apostles indicating apparently he was a person who knew how to comfort those in distress. Barnabas was a Levite, which means he was from the priestly line of Israel. Levi was one of Jacob's sons in Genesis. Later the Levites were set apart as the Jewish priests who served first in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple. Barnabas was a great help to the apostle Paul. After Paul had his conversion experience on the road to Damascus and saw the Lord, the apostles in Jerusalem didn't believe Paul's conversion was genuine and were afraid of Paul, but Barnabas vouched for him (Acts 9:27). They traveled together preaching the gospel (Acts 13:1-14:28). Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus which has some significance when we read Acts 15:36-39. First Corinthians was written about AD 59, but about five years earlier, Paul and Barnabas had an argument and parted company (Acts 15:39). Apparently all was well between them now.

**-Have we not the power to forbear working?** What he may mean is "As an apostle, I could draw a salary from those I serve." But, Paul chose to be a tentmaker and pay his own way. Paul puts more context to this statement beginning with verse 7.

Verse 7–

Paul gives illustrations (rhetorical questions) from everyday life; everyone, no matter what profession, has a right to compensation for their work.

Verses 8,9–

Indicating that Paul was writing to a largely Jewish congregation he gives an example from the Law of Moses and quotes Deuteronomy 25:4. Even a beast of the field is able to eat because of the work it does—If God cares for animals how much more will he take care of men. The word **corn** in the KJV was a generic word for all *grains* in 1611.

Verses 10-12—

Did God do for the sake of the apostles later? (Romans 15:4). Paul seems to believe it applies nicely.

**-He that ploweth should plow in hope...be partaker in hope.** He expresses his unexercised rights, that of earning an income (remember Paul made tents for a living). One who is in the professional ministry has a right to be compensated for his work. **If we have sown...spiritual...shall reap...carnal things** (vs. 11).

**-If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power, but suffer all things** (vs. 12). If the Corinthian church supported others, was not Paul even more deserving of their support? Yet he did not take it. This is the approach some take in the ministry, for example a missionary; he may not take a salary from those he serves because doing so would **hinder the gospel of Christ**. Yet, as the ministry grows, he would be fully within his rights to draw a salary.

Verse 13—

Here's another illustration that is fully Jewish. **They which minister...live of the temple...partakers of the altar**. The Levite priests received their compensation from the offerings and sacrifices that were given and made in the Temple.

Verse 14—

**Ordained...they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel**. The KJV uses the word **ordained** and the NKJV uses **commanded**. Is it commanded that the preacher of the gospel be paid. Perhaps that's a good translation, but it could be too strong of a word. The word *appointed* could also be a good translation. Regardless, Paul's point is that the Lord's plan is for the one who preaches the gospel to be able to make his living from the gospel if he so chooses (just like the soldier, or the farmer, or the herdsman).

Verse 15,16—

But Paul refuses payment, why? **But I have used none of these things.**

-it doesn't seem to be a command of God for one who proclaims the gospel to get paid, rather it is His plan. Therefore it is not a sin to not get paid for preaching the gospel.

-Also, the role of the apostle was not the role of the local church pastor. They are not the same. Paul was not their pastor.

The bottom line for Paul: He wanted only the compensation that would come from the Lord. Otherwise, someone else could take credit for Paul's success in the ministry. Paul wanted all the glory to go to God.

**-For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of...woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel**. This verse is often interpreted incorrectly as applying all ministers of the gospel, but the pronoun **I** makes it clear this is only about Paul. He had to preach the gospel.

Verse 17—

In fact, Paul did not preach the gospel, **this thing willingly**. He would rather have been a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Because it was **against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me**.

What is a dispensation? The word is *oikonomia* in Greek; *oikos* = house, *nomos*=law, which means literally *house law* (NKJV uses the word *stewardship*, yet dispensation is the better word). It is used of a person who rules over the house. We also get our word *economy*. In this case Paul was given a dispensation over the *household of faith*, what we would call today, the *dispensation of grace*. Ephesians 3:2; Colossians 1:25.

Do you believe a dispensation was committed to Paul? The word **committed** is the verb form of the word faith. Therefore, Paul was *faithed* with a particular economy or, he was put in charge of this dispensation of grace (Galatians 2:7; *committed* the exact same word/form).

Verse 18—

**—What is my reward then?...I abuse not my power in the gospel**. This gospel was committed to Paul, our role is to proclaim it.