

Paul's opponents were attempting to devalue both Paul and his message on the basis of his financial practices. When Paul was first presenting the gospel to people and starting a new church, he never accepted any financial or material support from them. This practice ran counter to popular Greek thinking in which philosophers and sophists sold their "wisdom", if it was considered of any value. Paul's opponents correspondingly claimed that Paul's failure to take support indicated a valueless message or incompetent messenger.

Paul, however, did not want to appear as if he preached for financial gain. Even though he taught that God intended for a man to live from his labors, he personally chose not to use this right. Five explicit statements in this passage explain Paul's reason for accepting no material support from the Corinthians. They will give us a better understanding of Paul's motivation and a better understanding of what should be motivating us.

1. Paul accepted no material support from the Corinthian believers to elevate them (v 7).

- a. Paul elevated the Corinthian believers in that he thought of them more highly than of himself by preaching the gospel free of charge. Because Paul preached the gospel and the Corinthians believed, they also were elevated by God to heavenly places. By being in Christ they are seated there with Christ (Ephesians 2:6).
- b. Paul asked the Corinthians if this effort to exalt them was sin. Logically, it would not be sin when God had done so much to extend good news to men. Scripturally, Jesus and then Paul taught that we should think more highly of others than of ourselves. It is not sinful to humble ourselves in order to elevate others.

We can evaluate our own actions by asking whom we seek to elevate. Is it God, others or myself? The right motivation will be revealed, when we are thinking more highly of others than ourselves.

2. Paul accepted no material support from the Corinthian believers to serve them (v 8).

- a. Paul uses the normal work here for "service" (i.e., "ministry", cf. "deacon"). The sense of the word here is doing or providing that which is needed by another. The Corinthians had needed a clear presentation of the gospel which Paul had done without any motivation to get money.
- b. Paul's description of how he was able to do this emphasizes by hyperbole how important he understood this service to be. Paul "pillaged" (i.e., "robbed") other churches in order to get his "ration-money" (i.e., "wages"). Paul was exaggerating his terms since we know that the believers in Macedonia had sent a gift and not been "robbed". But they had not directly benefitted from his ministry. The Corinthians were benefitted, but not at their own cost.

When our first priority is getting non-Christians to attend church, we may wrongly mis-communicate a desire to have them serve us or our programs. We serve non-Christians best by first sharing the gospel with them ... free of charge.

3. Paul accepted no material support from the Corinthian believers to avoid burdening them (v 9).

- a. The two different terms which are used for burdening seem to imply a burdening that keeps a person from doing something else (cf. Mk 14:40; 1 Tim 5:16). Paul does not wish to divert funds from other things to his personal support. He can freely encourage them to give generously to the impoverished believers in Jerusalem and he can accept funds from Macedonia when it is their contribution to the spiritual battle to win Corinthians to Christ.
- b. Features here also add emphasis to the importance he placed upon his no-support policy. He did not seek help even when in need. He saw God's provision in the gift from Macedonia. In everything he kept himself from being a burden and would continue to do so.

Businessmen know that an investment is a loss if it does not gain more that could have been made by putting the money into a bank account. As Christians we need to similarly evaluate the investment of our resources. We may not be burdening others, but are we keeping ourselves from investing in more important areas? E.g., we may not use our time to do evil, but do we invest our time in things with eternal value.

4. Paul accepted no material support from the Corinthian believers to love them (vv 10-11).

- a. It is possible that Paul's opponents had actually twisted his refusal to take support as a sign of loveless detachment. But the Corinthian believers should have known that he loved them.
- b. Paul's emphasis should probably be understood as "The truth of Christ is in me (when I say) that my boasting with not be stopped." Paul's commitment to preach the gospel at no charge was a visible manifestation of that which he had received. He had received freely, he would give freely.

As an international church with many transient people we must continually choose to invest in people spiritually because we love them and not because of what they might contribute to us. Although the Corinthians didn't leave, Paul left the Corinthians. He knew from the start that there would be a time for separation. If we despair at the revolving door through which so many come and go, let us renew our love for people and serve out of love.

5. Paul accepted no material support from the Corinthian believers to open their eyes to the true nature of his opponents (vv 12-15).

- a. This is an implication from the direct statement in verse 12. Paul probably has in mind the disadvantage which his opponents knew they endured because they accepted money and Paul did not. They wanted Paul to accept payment to place them on equal grounds. But Paul was determined to keep that opportunity from happening.
- b. To Paul it was important that the Corinthians see the true nature of his opponents. They were not local elders who deserved financial support but outsiders claiming authority which they did not have. They were false apostles and deceitful workmen who claiming a commissioning by Christ which they did not have and who preached a message that was false. They were men who received their teaching from their master, Satan, and who claimed to represent righteousness. (They probably taught a righteousness by keeping the law, which cannot happen.) They were men who would be judged lacking by the very law they taught and would get the condemnation they deserved.

Like Paul we must realize that how we live will be compared with how others live. Our lives should demonstrate the truth. As a church, too, we should pass any test of measurement with the truth. We need to continue to preach the gospel free of charge, without motive of material gain, without adding anything extra to that message.

Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and was raised again the third day according to the Scriptures. That is the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This is our primary message to those around us. As we enter this Christmas season, let us pray for opportunities to speak of Jesus and the reason of his birth. Pray for boldness to speak and a clear message.