

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION TO 1 CORINTHIANS 9

The principal things in this chapter are the proof of the apostle's office and authority; arguments for his own maintenance, and the maintenance of Gospel ministers; reasons why he did not make use of his right and privilege in this respect: and the whole is concluded with an exhortation to diligence and perseverance in the Christian course of life, of which he himself was an example. He begins with his office, as an apostle, and proves it; partly by his independency on men, not having his call and mission from them; and partly by his corporeal sight of Christ, and the authority which he in person received from him; and also by the success of his ministry among the Corinthians, (~~400~~1 Corinthians 9:1), wherefore, whatever might be objected to him by other persons, they had no reason to object to his apostleship, seeing they, being converted under his ministry, were so many seals of it, (~~400~~1 Corinthians 9:2), and since his call to the ministry was firm and valid, he had a right, as other ministers, to a maintenance of himself and family, should he have any, from the churches, without labouring with his own hands, (~~400~~1 Corinthians 9:3-6), which he proves from the law of nature and nations, exemplified in the cases of soldiers, planters of vineyards, and keepers of flocks, who by virtue of their calling and service have a right to a livelihood, between whom, and ministers of the Gospel, there is some resemblance, (~~400~~1 Corinthians 9:7), and also from the law of Moses, particularly the law respecting the ox, which was not to be muzzled when it tread out the corn; and which he observes is to be understood, not only and barely in the letter of oxen, but of ministers of the word, who are as husbandmen that plough and thresh in hope, and therefore should be partakers of their hope, (~~400~~1 Corinthians 9:8-10). Moreover, the apostle argues the right of the maintenance of the ministers of the Gospel, from the justice and equity of the thing, that seeing they minister spiritual things, it is but reasonable that they should receive temporal ones, (~~400~~1 Corinthians 9:11), and which the apostle argues for himself, and Barnabas, as from the instances of other apostles, (~~400~~1 Corinthians 9:5,6), so from the examples of those that succeeded him in Corinth, who were maintained by that church; though he did not think fit,

when among them, to claim his right, and make use of his power, lest any check should be put to the progress of the Gospel, (~~4012~~1 Corinthians 9:12). And he goes on to make this point clear and manifest from the case of, the priests and Levites under the former dispensation, who ministering in holy things, had a provision made for them, (~~4013~~1 Corinthians 9:13). And lastly, from the constitution and appointment of Christ himself, who has ordained it as a law of his, that the preachers of the Gospel should live of it, (~~4014~~1 Corinthians 9:14), though the apostle himself did not make use of this his privilege; nor would he ever make use of it, especially at Corinth, for which he gives his reasons; and his principal one was, that his glorying might not be made void, (~~4015~~1 Corinthians 9:15) which did not lie in preaching the Gospel, for that he was obliged to do, (~~4016~~1 Corinthians 9:16), for if he had engaged in it of his own accord, he would have had his reward; but since it was through necessity, he could not claim any, (~~4017~~1 Corinthians 9:17), or if any, it could be no other than to preach the Gospel “gratis”, and without charge, which was the thing he gloried in, (~~4018~~1 Corinthians 9:18), and thus, though he lived independent of men, both with respect to his office and his maintenance, yet in order to gain souls to Christ, and be the instrument of their salvation, he became a servant to all, (~~4019~~1 Corinthians 9:19), who are distributed into three sorts, the Jews that were under the law, (~~4020~~1 Corinthians 9:20), the Gentiles that were without the law, (~~4021~~1 Corinthians 9:21), and weak Christians, (~~4022~~1 Corinthians 9:22), all which he did, not with any lucrative view to himself, but for the sake of the Gospel, that he might partake of that, and of the glory he was called unto by it, (~~4023~~1 Corinthians 9:23) which, and not temporal things, he was looking unto, and pressing after; and which he illustrates by a metaphor taken from the Grecian games, well known to the Corinthians, particularly that of running races, in which all ran, but one only had the prize: wherefore he exhorts the Corinthians to run in like manner, that they may obtain the prize which he mentions, and describes as an incorruptible crown, in opposition to a corruptible one, which others strove for, (~~4024~~1 Corinthians 9:24,25), and to this he animates by his own example and conduct, which he expresses in terms borrowed from racers and wrestlers, expressive of his humility, sobriety, and temperance; which things he exercised, that whilst he was a preacher to others, he might not be worthy of reproof and disapprobation himself, (~~4025~~1 Corinthians 9:26,27).

Ver. 1. *Amos I not an apostle? am I not free?* etc.] The Syriac, Ethiopic, and Vulgate Latin versions, put the last clause first; so the Alexandrian

copy, and some other copies; and many interpreters are of opinion that it is the best order of the words; the apostle proceeding by a gradation from the less to the greater, having respect either to his freedom in the use of things indifferent, as eating of meats, etc. for though he did not think fit to use his liberty, to the wounding of weak consciences, it did not follow therefore that he was not free, as some might suggest from what he had said in the latter part of the foregoing chapter: or he may have respect to his freedom from the ceremonial law in general; for though, for the sake of gaining souls to Christ, he became all things to all men; to the Jews he became a Jew, that he might gain them; yet in such a manner as to preserve his liberty in Christ, without entangling himself with the yoke of bondage. Some have thought he intends, by his liberty, his right to insist upon a maintenance, and that he was no more obliged to work with his hands than other persons, of which he treats at large hereafter; but to me it rather seems that the words stand in their right order; and that, whereas there were some persons that either denied him to be an apostle, or at least insinuated that he was not one, nor was he to be treated as such, he goes upon the proof of it; and the first thing he mentions is his freedom, that is, from men; no man had any authority over him; he was not taught, nor sent forth, nor ordained by men as a minister, but immediately by Jesus Christ, as apostles were; they were set in the first place in the church, and had power to instruct, send forth, and ordain others; but none had power over them; and this being the apostle's case, proved him to be one; he was an apostle, because he was free:

have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? He had a spiritual sight of him by faith, but that did not show him to be an apostle; this is what he had in common with other believers: whether he saw him in the flesh, before his crucifixion and death, is not certain; it is very probable he might; yet this was no more than what Herod and Pontius Pilate did; but he saw him after his resurrection from the dead, to which he refers, (~~465~~ 1 Corinthians 15:8) and designs here, as a proof of his apostleship, this being what the apostles were chosen to be eyewitnesses of, (~~410~~ Acts 10:41) and publish to the world: now our apostle saw him several times; first at the time of his conversion, next when in a trance at Jerusalem, and again in the castle where the chief captain put him for security, and very probably also when he was caught up into the third heaven:

are not you my work in the Lord? as they were regenerated, converted persons, and were become new creatures; not efficiently, but

instrumentally; they were God's workmanship, as he was the efficient cause of their conversion and faith; his only, as an instrument by whom they believed; and therefore he adds, "in the Lord"; ascribing the whole to his power and grace: however, as he had been the happy instrument of first preaching the Gospel to them, and of begetting them again through it; of founding and raising such a large flourishing church as they were; it was no inconsiderable proof of his apostleship.

Ver. 2. *If I be not an apostle unto others*, etc.] This is said by way of supposition, not concession; for he was an apostle to many others; he was an apostle of the Gentiles in general; as the apostleship of the circumcision belonged to Peter, that of the uncircumcision fell to his share: but however, as if he should say, be that as it will,

yet doubtless I am to you; all the signs of apostleship were wrought among them; not only the grace of God was implanted in them under his ministry, but the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were received by them through it; and many signs, wonders, and mighty deeds, were done in the midst of them by him: (see ⁴⁷¹²2 Corinthians 12:12) which were sufficient to put the matter quite out of doubt with them:

for the seal of mine apostleship, are ye in the Lord; alluding to the sealing of deeds and writings, which render them authentic; or to the sealing of letters, confirming the truth of what is therein expressed; and the sense is, that their being converted persons, and so openly in the Lord, in union with him; or being made new creatures by the power of his grace, through his preaching, was an authentic proof of his apostleship, and served him instead of a letter testimonial and recommendatory; (see ⁴⁷¹³2 Corinthians 3:1-3). Some copies read, "the seal of my epistle", and so the Ethiopic version.

Ver. 3. *Mine answer to them that do examine me is this*.] These words are referred by some to the following, as if the apostle's answer lay in putting the questions he does in the next verses; but they rather seem to belong to the preceding, and the meaning to be this, that when any persons called in question his apostleship, and examined him upon that head, what he thought fit to say in answer to them, and in defence of himself, was by referring them to the famous church at Corinth, who were as particular persons, and as a church, his work in the Lord, and everyone of them as so many seals of his apostleship; he being the first preacher of the Gospel to

them, the founder of them as a church, and the instrument of their conversion.

Ver. 4. *Have we not power to eat and to drink?*] Having proved his apostleship, he proceeds to establish his right to a maintenance as a Gospel minister; which he expresses by various phrases, and confirms by divers arguments: by a “power to eat and drink”, he does not mean the common power and right of mankind to perform such actions, which everyone has, provided he acts temperately, and to the glory of God; nor a liberty of eating and drinking things indifferent, or which were prohibited under the ceremonial law; but a comfortable livelihood at the public charge, or at the expense of the persons to whom he ministered; and he seems to have in view the words of Christ, (~~200~~Luke 10:7,8).

Ver. 5. *Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife,* etc.] The phrase “a sister, a wife”, is an Hebraism, and answers to *hl kytj a*, “my sister, spouse”, (~~200~~Song of Solomon 4:9,10,12 5:1). The Jews called their wives, sisters, not on account of religion, which also is not the meaning here; but because of the common relation that men and women, all mankind, stand in to one another, antecedent to any nearer relation, as that of man and wife. The sense the Papists put on these words, to secure them from being a proof of the lawfulness of the marriage of the ministers of the Gospel, can by no means be the true one; which is, that they are to be understood of a rich woman, or women, the apostles had a power to carry about with them, to minister of their substance to them, and provide for them; for such a sense is directly contrary to the subject and argument the apostle is upon; which is to show the right that he and others had, of casting themselves entirely upon the churches for a maintenance; whereas this is contriving a way for relieving the churches of such a charge; besides, the act of “leading”, or carrying “about”, is expressive of such a power over them, as cannot be thought to agree with persons of such substance; and whose voluntary act this must be, to go along with them and supply them; add to this, that for the apostles to lead about with them wherever they went women, whether rich or poor, that were not their wives, would be of no good report, and must tend to hurt their character and reputation: moreover, though these words clearly imply the lawfulness of a minister’s marriage, and suppose it, yet they do not express the act itself, or the lawfulness of entering into such a state, but rather what follows after it; and the sense is this, that the apostle and others, supposing them to have wives, and it may be added also, and children, they had a right to take these

with them wherever they went, and insist upon the maintenance of them, as well as of their own, at the public expense:

as well as other apostles; who it seems did so, that had wives and families, as Philip the Evangelist had four daughters, (~~4218~~ Acts 21:8,9).

And as the brethren of the Lord: who it seems were married persons, and took such a method; by whom are meant James, Joses, Judas, and Simon; who were the near kinsmen of Christ, it being usual with the Jews to call such brethren:

and Cephas; that is, Peter, who it is certain had a wife; (see ~~4184~~ Matthew 8:14) and therefore it is with a very ill grace that the pope, who pretends to be Peter's successor, should forbid the marriage of ecclesiastical persons.

Ver. 6. *Or I only and Barnabas*, etc.] Who were for a great while companions and fellow travellers; are we alone? are we exempted from those rights and privileges, common to others?

have not we power to forbear working? that is, with their hands, at their trades and occupations, to get their living by: Paul worked at his trade, and so it seems Barnabas did likewise: Paul wrought with his hands at Corinth, in company with Aquila and Priscilla, they being tentmakers as he, (~~4183~~ Acts 18:3) and so he did in other places; he appeals for the truth of this to the elders of the church at Ephesus, (~~4184~~ Acts 20:34) and to the church of the Thessalonians, (~~5119~~ 1 Thessalonians 2:9 ~~5118~~ 2 Thessalonians 3:8) not but that he had a right and power to leave off business, to forbear working, and require a maintenance from those to whom he ministered; but for some reasons he chose not to make use of this his power and liberty, because he would not be chargeable to them; and lest that upon his first preaching the Gospel to them, they should think he had worldly selfish ends in view, and not the good of souls, and glory of Christ; however, he hereby lets them know, that though Barnabas and he continued to get their bread by their own hand labour, they had a right to quit their trades, and throw themselves upon them for a maintenance. The apostle seems, in this, to imitate the ancient, wise, and holy men of his nation, who taught the law freely, and took nothing for it; not that they thought it was unlawful, or that they had no right to a maintenance on account of it, but for the honour of religion, and that piety they professed; and lest the law should be thought to be made a trade of, they chose not to insist upon it ^{f148}.

Ver. 7. *Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?* etc.] Some people have done so, as did the Habessines^{f149}, and the ancient Romans^{f150}; though before the apostle wrote this, the senate had made an act, that the soldiers should have a stipend from the public; and this being now so common, and universally obtaining everywhere, the apostle puts the question he does; and his meaning is, that since ministers of the Gospel are the good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and are engaged in a warfare state, in fighting the good fight of faith, against his enemies, and those of his church, it is but reasonable that their charges should be bore, and they maintained at the public expense:

who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? The church of Christ is a vineyard, it is often so called in Scripture; ministers are planters, vinedressers, and labourers in it; and as the mystical Solomon, the owner of the vineyard, ought to have his thousand, the cultivators of it, the keepers of the fruit, should have their two hundred, (^{<2182>}Song of Solomon 8:12)

Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? The churches of Christ are compared to flocks of sheep; the ministers of the word are pastors, or shepherds, who have the care and oversight of them, and feed them with knowledge and understanding; and it is but right and just that they enjoy the fruit of their labours, and have a proper and suitable maintenance, as it is that he who feeds a flock should eat of the milk which that produces.

Ver. 8. *Say I these things as a man?* etc.] After the manner of men, reasoning from things common among men, and obvious to everyone's observation:

or saith not the law the same also? As the subject the apostle is upon was capable of being illustrated and confirmed by instances common unto, and easy of observation among men; so it might be supported by divine authority; it was not only a clear point from the reason of things, but was certain by the law of God.

Ver. 9. *For it is written in the law of Moses,* etc.] (^{<6234>}Deuteronomy 25:4)

Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. The manner of threshing, or beating out the corn among the Jews, was not the same with ours; it was not done by the flail, at least not always, but by the means of oxen; and by these not only treading upon it to and fro, but drawing a wooden instrument after them, the bottom of which was stuck

with iron teeth, and the top of it filled with stones, to press it down close by the weight thereof; the sheaves put in proper form, the oxen were led to and fro upon them, drawing this threshing instrument after them, by which means the grain was separated from the husk and ear^{f151}; (see ^{<3415>}Isaiah 41:15) The learned Beckius^{f152} has given us a figure of this instrument, and the manner of using it: now according to this law, whilst the ox was thus employed, its mouth was not to be muzzled, but it might freely eat of the corn it trod upon, excepting, the Jews say^{f153}, what was dedicated to sacred uses. They give many rules relating to this law, and particularly observe, that it is to be extended to all sorts of creatures, as well as the ox, and to all sorts of business^{f154}; and that what is said of the ox, is much more to be observed with respect to men^{f155}; and which agrees with the apostle's reasoning here:

doth God take care for oxen? yes, he does, and for creatures of less importance than they, even the fowls of the air, and the most worthless of them, sparrows, two of which are sold for a farthing; but not for them only, nor principally, but chiefly for men.

Ver. 10. *Or saith he it altogether for our sakes*, etc.] That is, God says this, or delivers out this law, forbidding the muzzling the ox, while it treads out the corn; not merely for the sake of the ox, but chiefly for the sake of men; and so Jarchi upon the place says, that the ox is mentioned, **יָדָא תַּא אַיְנְוְהִל**, “to express man”; and so another of the Jewish writers^{f156} interprets the law in (^{<1526>}Deuteronomy 22:6). “Thou shalt not take the dam with the young”;

“the intention of the command is, not to have mercy on birds, “but for the sake of men”, he (God) says this, whom he would accustom to meekness and compassion:”

and particularly this is here said, for the sake of ministers of the Gospel, who for their spiritual strength, and labours in their work, may be compared to oxen; (see ^{<3110>}Ezekiel 1:10). This law is elsewhere produced by the apostle, and urged in favour of the maintenance of ministers, as here, (^{<3457>}1 Timothy 5:17,18) and therefore

for our sakes no doubt it is written; to teach men, that as any workmen are not to be deprived of proper sustenance, so neither they that labour in the word and doctrine:

that he that ploweth should plow in hope; of enjoying the fruit of his labours:

and that he that thresheth in hope, should be partaker of his hope; of having a supply out of that he is threshing.

Ver. 11. *If we have sown unto you spiritual things*, etc.] The preachers of the Gospel are compared to sowers of seed; the seed they sow is the word of God, which is like to seed, for its smallness and despicableness in the eyes of carnal men; and yet as the seed is the choicest which is laid by for sowing, the Gospel is most choice and excellent to true believers; like seed, it has a generative virtue through divine influence; and whereas unless sown into the earth, it brings forth no fruit, so neither does the word, unless it has a place in the heart, where, as seed in the ground, its operation is secret, its increase gradual, and its fruitfulness different. The ground they sow upon is, very various; some of their hearers are like the wayside, careless, ignorant, and on whom no impression is made; others are like the stony ground, who though for a while they express some affection and liking, yet not having the root of grace in them, whenever persecution arises, forsake the hearing of it; others are like the thorny ground, which are at first very promising, and greatly reformed, but inwardly full of the cares and lusts of the world, which choke the word, and make it unfruitful; and others are like the good ground, who are made good by the grace of God, understand the word, receive it, hold it fast, and in whom it is fruitful: sowing requires skill and art, and so preaching the Gospel does, and that more than human; and is constantly in its returning season to be attended to, notwithstanding the winds and clouds, and so the ministry of the word, notwithstanding all reproaches, persecutions, and afflictions; and as the same sort of seed, without mixture, and in plenty, is to be cast into the earth, so the same pure and unmixed Gospel of Christ is to be preached, and that without keeping back any thing that is profitable: and once more, as the sower, when he has cast his seed into the earth, waits long and with patience for its springing up and increase, so do the faithful dispensers of the Gospel: and what they sow or minister is of a spiritual nature; it comes from the Spirit of God, he is the dictator of it; he by his gifts qualifies men to preach it, and by his power makes it effectual to the souls of men; and through it conveys himself to them, as a spirit of regeneration and sanctification: the matter of the Gospel is spiritual; it contains spiritual doctrines, such as justification, pardon of sin, adoption, regeneration, etc.

and are what concern the souls and spirits of men, and their spiritual and eternal welfare:

is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? meaning temporal ones, what concern the flesh, the body, the outward man, and the support thereof. The argument is from the greater to the less, and much the same with that in (⁴⁶¹⁷Romans 15:27). The difference between carnal and spiritual things is very great; the one has a vastly superior excellency to the other; and therefore if for carnal things men receive spiritual ones, they can be no losers thereby, but must be gainers; nor should it be thought any hardship or burden upon them, or any great and wonderful thing done by them, to support and maintain such who are so useful to their souls, and the spiritual welfare of them.

Ver. 12. *If others are partakers of this power over you,* etc.] Meaning not any tyrannical power and jurisdiction over them, with respect either to faith or practice; but the right of a maintenance, which either the false apostles, or the true ordinary ministers of the word there, justly claimed, and did enjoy:

are not we rather? he and Barnabas, especially himself, who was more than an ordinary minister, an apostle, and the first preacher of the Gospel to them:

nevertheless, we have not used this power; though others had, and they had a right to it, but did not choose to insist upon it; and, rather than do so, worked with their own hands; their not making use of this power was not because they stood in no need of it, and enjoyed an affluence of temporal things, for the reverse of this was their case:

but suffer all things: famine, thirst, nakedness, hard labour, and many other hardships:

lest we should hinder the Gospel of Christ; some might suggest, that they preached the Gospel only for gain, and not for the good of souls, and glory of Christ; and other mean spirited persons might be backward of embracing and professing the Gospel, lest it should become chargeable to them; wherefore that the Gospel might not be retarded in its course by the calumny of some, and the sordidness of others, the apostle thought fit to drop his claim to a maintenance from them; though at the same time he would have them know it was a just due, and therefore goes on to defend it by other arguments.

Ver. 13. *Do ye not know, that they which minister about holy things,* etc.] Not the priests in the temples of the Heathen deities, as the Ethiopic version suggests; but the priests in the temple at Jerusalem, who were employed in slaying the sacrifices, taking off their skins, cutting them into pieces, laying them in order with the wood upon the altar, and burning them, with other services they there performed, which were well known to the Corinthians, many of this church being Jews:

live of the things of the temple; the tithes and firstfruits, and other oblations, and presents in money or goods, thither brought; nor had they any other way of living and supporting their families; for the priests and Levites had no inheritance among the children of Israel, and therefore provision was made for them in this way:

and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar; some read it, “who sit at the altar”; but none might sit in the temple but a king of the house of David ^{f157}; the priests and Levites always stood in their ministry, some doing one thing, and some another; some slew the sacrifice, others sprinkled the blood; some took away the ashes, others laid the wood, others brought up the parts of the sacrifice when slain, skinned, and cut asunder, and laid them on the altar ^{f158}, and these partook with the altar; some parts the altar devoured, being consumed by fire upon it; but then there were other pieces which by law were reserved for the priests, and upon which they and their families lived: hence the distinction of *j bzm tl yka*, the food of the altar, and *µda tl yka*, “the food of man” ^{f159}; and therefore as it was but just and equitable that persons so employed should be maintained out of the revenues of the temple and altar, it is but right that Gospel ministers should be provided for with a suitable maintenance.

Ver. 14. *Even so hath the Lord ordained,* etc.] That is, the Lord Jesus Christ, in (~~4000~~ Matthew 10:10 ~~2107~~ Luke 10:7,8) it is an order and appointment of his that his ministering servants, who labour in preaching his Gospel, should be sufficiently taken care of, as to a comfortable livelihood; he has not indeed fixed it in the same way as the priests and Levites had theirs under the law; but as the one was just and right, that they should be maintained out of the things belonging to the temple and altar, and live on them, so it is his will and pleasure,

that they which preach the Gospel; that continue to do so, that labour, and not loiter in the word and doctrine, who do the work of the ministry fully and faithfully, and not bear the name only of Gospel preachers: should live of the Gospel; not the Gospel itself, which is spiritual, and not corporeal food; but the sense is, that in consideration and because of their preaching the Gospel, they should be supplied with the proper necessities of life: the learned Mr. Mede has proved, by various instances, that the word *ευαγγελιον*, here rendered “Gospel”, and which signifies good news and glad tidings, is in other writers used for a reward, given to such that bring good tidings; and has rightly observed, that the Hebrew word *hrqb*, which signifies the same, is used in a like sense in (~~2~~2 Samuel 4:10) and accordingly the sense here will be, that it is the ordination of Christ, that such who faithfully bring the news and glad tidings of salvation to sinners, should, as a reward for such good news, be provided for with a comfortable maintenance, on which they should live.

Ver. 15. *But I have used none of these things*, etc.] Either none of these arguments or reasons, for a minister’s maintenance, taken from the reason of things, the law of Moses, the examples of the priests and Levites, and the order and appointment of Christ, in favour of himself, and that he might be provided for by them accordingly; or none of the things he had a right to do as other apostles, as to eat and drink at the public expense, to lead about with him a sister, a wife, had he any, and to forbear working with his own hands:

neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me; it was not on his own account that he gave these strong reasons, urged these instances, and so undeniably proved this point, that ministers should be maintained by the people; and this he says to prevent what some might be ready enough to suggest, that though the apostle had as yet took nothing of the church at Corinth, it was plain, that for the time to come, he meant to do it; and therefore had written these things with such a view, to make way for his after supply from them. This he denies, and gives his reason for it,

for it were better for me to die; through want, with famine, could he be supplied no other way, than to take the least farthing of them:

or than that any man should make my glorying void; meaning not so much his inward pleasure, joy, and satisfaction in preaching the Gospel freely, it

being more blessed to give than to receive; but his boasting or glorying, not before God, but against the false apostles; that he had never taken anything of the church at Corinth for preaching, nor never would, when they had insinuated he preached for gain, and by artful methods had got their money, and drained their purses.

Ver. 16. *For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of,* etc.]

The sense is not, that if he preached the Gospel in order for a livelihood, and to serve his private advantage, he should have no room for glorying; since, if this was the case, he should be obliged to do it, or perish for want: but his meaning is, that though he preached the Gospel ever so well, or ever so freely, and might glory before men, and against the false teachers, who insulted him in his character and office; yet not before God, from whom he received all his gifts, abilities, and qualifications, to preach the Gospel; all his light and knowledge in it; all his enlargements in meditation, and liberty in expression; all his faithfulness and integrity, courage and intrepidity, in the discharge and performance of his work, were by divine grace and assistance; and his success in it owing to the power and Spirit of God, so that he had nothing to glory of on any of these accounts: hence these words are a correction, or rather an explanation of the preceding:

for necessity is laid upon me; not of getting a livelihood by preaching, for he could have got, and did get this another way, even by labouring with his hands; nor of force and compulsion, for no one more readily engaged in it, or more cheerfully performed it; but of obligation from the divine call to this work, and from his own conscience, in which he knew it to be an heavenly one, and from the nature of the trust committed to him, and because of the good of immortal souls, and the honour of Christ; all which lay with weight upon him, and obliged him in duty, love, and gratitude, to attend to it:

yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel; which is to be understood, not of any temporal affliction, as reproach, persecution, famine, nakedness, sword, etc. for such sort of woes frequently attend those that do preach the Gospel; but of the wounding of his conscience, and exposing himself, through the neglect of his calling, and contempt of the divine will, to the wrath and curse of God for ever; not that the apostle feared this would be his case, or that it possibly could be; but he thus speaks, to show what he or any other minister of the Gospel would deserve, at the hand of God, who having abilities to preach, should not make use of them; or should

preach, but not the Gospel; or only a part of it, and not the whole; or should entirely desist from it, through self-interest, or the fear of man, or through being ashamed of Christ and his Gospel, or as not able to bear the reproach and persecution attending it.

Ver. 17. *For if I do this thing willingly*, etc.] That is, not freely and without receiving anything for preaching, without seeking any temporal profits and advantages; nor in pure love to Christ, and the good of souls, without any fear of punishment, or hope of reward; but the apostle supposes a case which was not, and his sense is, that supposing no necessity had been laid upon him, or any injunction or command given him to preach the Gospel, but he had entered on it without any obligation upon him, then, says he,

I have a reward; or should have one, or might expect one; so the Jews ^{f160} say, that a reward is given to him, who does anything unbidden:

but if against my will, or unwillingly,

a dispensation of the Gospel is committed to me; which was his case; the Gospel was committed to his trust, as anything is to the trust and charge of a steward by his lord, who is obliged to take care of it, and is accountable for it, and of whom faithfulness is required; he did not undertake this economy, or dispensation of the Gospel of himself, of his own mind and will, but it was enjoined him by one that had the command over him, and could and did oblige him to take the charge of it; though he made him willing, as well as able to do it: and therefore since this was the case, that it was not at his own option whether he would preach the Gospel or not, but he was obliged to it by one, that had a superior power and influence over him; hence, though he performed it ever so well, and with never so much faithfulness and integrity, he asks in the following verse,

Ver. 18. *What is my reward then?* etc.] None at all, I have none to expect, hope for, or claim, in a way of debt; I am a servant intrusted by my Lord with the Gospel, and an unprofitable one I am; I do, at most and best, but what is my duty, and for that I can claim no reward: all the reward that remains is only this,

verily, that when I preach the Gospel, which I am obliged to do,

I may make the Gospel of Christ without charge; to them that hear it, as he did to the Corinthians, which was his glorying in (~~4015~~ 1 Corinthians 9:15)

and is the same with his reward here; for this means not any reward from God, but his glorying among men, and against the false teachers; that when he preached the word at Corinth, he was not chargeable to any, nor would he ever be: his reason for it is,

that I abuse not my power in the Gospel; his right of having a maintenance, whilst he was preaching the Gospel; to have made use of which would have been an abuse of it, since it would have given occasion to the false apostles to reproach and calumniate, and might have been an hinderance to the Gospel of Christ, and a stumbling to some weak minds.

Ver. 19. *For though I be free from all men*, etc.] As an apostle, being in the highest office in the church, he had none superior to him, that could exercise any power and authority over him, and was also independent of men for his maintenance, which he got by his own hand labour: though it may be observed, that the word “men” is not in the original text, and the word “all” may as well have respect to things as men; and the sense be, that he was free, as from the curse of the moral law, so from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and all the rituals of it, and might, if he would, make use of his Christian liberty; the following verses seem to incline to this sense, as the preceding ones do to the former:

yet have I made myself servant unto all; in faithfully and indefatigably preaching the Gospel to them; undergoing all manner of affliction and persecution for the sake of that and them; behaving towards them with all meekness and humility; condescending to their weakness, and accommodating himself to their capacities and customs:

that I might gain the more; than other apostles have done, or than it could be reasonably thought he should, had he behaved in a more lordly and domineering manner: his end was not to amass wealth, to gain riches and treasures of good things to himself, but many souls to Christ, who otherwise must have been lost; but being brought to the knowledge of Christ, and salvation by him through his ministry, it was profit to them, and gain to Christ: the metaphor is taken from merchants, who spare no pains, but take every method to acquire gain and profit; the ministers of the word are spiritual merchants, their traffic lies in the souls of men, whom they are studiously and anxiously careful to bring to Christ.

Ver. 20. *And unto the Jews I became as a Jew*, etc.] That is, in religion; or with respect to some religious observances peculiar to the Jews, for he

himself was really a Jew by nature; who became as one unto them in this sense, when he for their sakes circumcised Timothy at Derbe, or Lystra, purified himself at Jerusalem, shaved his head at Cenchrea, observed their sabbath, and abstained from some sorts of food forbidden in the law; and his end in so doing was, not to confirm them in such usages, but that he might hereby have the greater influence over them, and by little and little bring them off of these things, or, as he says,

that I might gain the Jews; bring them over to Christ, and off of a dependence on their own righteousness, for justification before God:

to them that are under the law, as under the law; the Vulgate Latin version adds, “when I was not under the law”, and so the Alexandrian copy and some others; by whom seem to be meant the same persons as before; though some have thought that the Samaritans are intended, and others the Sadducees: but if any as distinct from the former are designed, they should rather seem to be the converted Jews; who though they believed in Christ, looked upon themselves to be still under the law, and therefore observed it; with whom the apostle on certain occasions complied, as if he was under it too, that he might have the greater share in their affections and credit; hoping in time that by such means he might be able to prevail upon them to relinquish these things, and wholly attend to the Gospel and ordinances of Christ, or, as he says,

that I might gain them that are under the law; meaning the Jews, who were observers of the law of Moses.

Ver. 21. *To them that are without law, as without law*, etc.] Meaning the Gentiles, who, though they were not without the law of nature, nor without many good civil laws, by which the more cultivated and civilized nations among them were governed, yet they were without the written law of Moses; a description of the Gentiles, usual with the Jews; (see ^{<B12>}Romans 2:12,14). And to these the apostle accommodated himself, as if he was without the law; by conversing with them without any difference; by eating any sort of food with them; by not circumcising Titus, when the Jews would have had it done; and by resisting Peter, when he, by his example, would have influenced the Gentiles to have lived as did the Jews:

being not without law to God; or “the law of God”, the moral law; for though he was delivered from the curse and condemnation of it, and as a covenant of works, and the ministry of it by Moses, yet not from the matter

of it, and obedience to it, as a rule of walk and conversation: and therefore his compliance with the Gentiles was not in anything that was contrary to the moral law; nor did he act as one that had nothing to do with that law, “but” as one that was

under the law to Christ, or “under the law of Christ”; that is, the law of love, which obliged him to take every lawful and proper method for the good of such souls:

that I might gain them that were without law; to believe in Christ for life and salvation, and to serve the law of God as in the hands of Christ, the only Lawgiver and King in his church; in testimony of their gratitude to him, for the blessings of grace received by him, without having any dependence on their obedience to it, for acceptance with God.

Ver. 22. *To the weak became I as weak*, etc.] That is, to weak Christians, who were weak in faith, and had not such clear knowledge of Gospel liberty, and therefore scrupled the eating of some sorts of meat, and particularly meats offered to idols; and the apostle so far consulted the peace and edification of these weak brethren, and so far complied with them, and became as one of them, that, rather than offend them, he determined to eat no meat while the world stood:

that I might gain the weak; promote their edification and welfare, who otherwise might be stumbled, be in danger of falling from, and laid under a temptation to desert the faith of the Gospel:

I am made all things to all men; which is to be understood, as in all the other instances of his being so, not in cases and things criminal and sinful, contrary to the moral law, and the dictates of his own conscience, subversive of the Gospel of Christ, and of the order and discipline of it, but in cases and things of an indifferent nature:

that I might by all means save some; that is, that he might be the means of saving some of Jews and Gentiles, and of all sorts of men; by preaching the Gospel of salvation to them, and by directing them to Christ, the only Saviour of lost sinners; thus he explains what he means by so often saying that he might gain them.

Ver. 23. *And this I do for the Gospel's sake*, etc.] The Alexandrian copy and some others read, “all things I do”, etc. and so the Vulgate Latin and Ethiopic versions; that is, he became all things to all men, and so and so to

different persons; not for his own sake, for his own temporal advantage, or to curry favour with men; not for the sake of gaining wealth, or honour and applause to himself, but for the spread of the Gospel, and its greater usefulness among men: to which he adds,

that I might be partaker thereof with you; meaning either the fruit of the Gospel, the conversion and salvation of sinners, which would be matter of joy both to him and them; or the blessings of grace and eternal life, which the Gospel reveals and promises, which he desired to enjoy in common with others, not only with the Corinthians, for the word “you” is not in the original text, but with Jews and Gentiles; with men of all sorts, who may be gained over to Christ, and saved by him, through the ministry of the word.

Ver. 24. *Know ye not that they which run in a race,* etc.] The allusion in this and the following verses is to the Grecian games, which consisted, among other things, of running of races, and of wrestling, combating, and fighting; and which are in this and the context particularly mentioned: and the apostle the rather makes use of these terms, and refers to these things, because they were well known to the Corinthians, and refers to them as well known; for the Isthmian games were performed in their neighbourhood, and doubtless had been seen by many of them, for the Corinthians were presidents of them. The race, or stadium in which they ran, was the space or interval between the place they set out from, and that which they ran unto, and consisted of 125 paces, or 625 feet; it was the space of a furlong, and about the eighth part of a mile: in this they

run all; as many as would, that came around from all parts, striving who should be foremost and get the crown;

but one receives the prize; which was held by the president of the game, or judge of the race, and received by the winner, who was judged to be so by him; and was no other in the Isthmian games, which are most likely to be referred to here, than a crown made of pine tree branches, or leaves, and sometimes of dried parsley^{f161}:

so run that ye may obtain. The apostle accommodates or applies the above account to the Christian’s course of life, and exhorts to run in it in like manner as racers do in a race. The “stadium”, or “race” plot in the which the believer runs, is this world, or this present life; he is only a runner now and here, for no sooner is the time of his departure come, but his course or race is finished; and, as his forerunner Christ, sits down in full rest from all

his labours as at a table, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and on a throne with Christ: the course he runs includes the exercise of every grace, particularly faith, which is expressed not only by going to Christ, walking in him, but by fleeing and running to him; and the discharge of every duty, signified by a running in the way of God's commandments; and, in a word, the whole of a Christian profession, and the holding of it fast, and holding on in it unto the end. The act of "running" is a motion forward, a following on to know the Lord, a going from strength to strength, from one degree of grace to another, a pressing forward toward the mark for the prize; and requires spiritual strength from Christ, and a daily renewal of it; is to be performed with readiness, swiftness, and cheerfulness, in opposition to a slowness of heart to believe, and a slothfulness and sluggishness in the business and service of Christ. The manner of running, "so", that is, as the Grecians ran in their races; they ran "all", so should all believers run, ministers and churches, churches and the several members thereof, old and young professors; so the church determines for herself, her members, and the daughters of Jerusalem, "we will run after thee", (~~2000~~ Song of Solomon 1:4) and they have this encouragement which the others had not, for only one received the prize with the Grecians, but here all, that run well, obtain: again, they ran and strove to be foremost, who should get to the goal first and receive the prize, so should believers be emulous to outdo each other, to go before one another, in faith and holiness; striving in the strength of Christ, who should do most service for him, and bring most glory to him: moreover, as they ran in the way that was marked out for them, not turning to the right hand or the left, so should believers run in the way of salvation, which is Christ; in the way of holiness, faith, and truth; and in the path of duty and ordinances, which are all clearly pointed out unto them: once more, as they while running kept their eye upon the mark, so should believers, while running the race set before them, be continually looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of faith: to say no more, as they kept running till they came to the end of their race, so should the saints; there is no time for stopping or looking back; remember Lot's wife. The end of running is to obtain the prize, the incorruptible crown of eternal life; not that this is to be procured in a way of merit by running; for the best services of the saints have no merit in them, they are previously due to God, nor can they be profitable to him; and besides, are done by the assistance of his own grace and strength; nor is there any proportion between the best works of men, and this crown of glory, life, and righteousness; yea, salvation, or eternal life, is expressly denied to be of him that willeth, or of him that runneth,

and is always represented as this crown is, to be a free gift: the meaning of the expression is, that believers are to run on in their Christian race, that they may, and when they are come to the end of it they shall, as he that came foremost in the race did, stretch forth their hand, lay hold on, and receive the crown which the righteous Judge will give them; and is the true import of the word made use of here, and the sense the same with (^{<50f2>}1 Timothy 6:12). “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life”, and denotes that the persevering saint shall enjoy the crown.

Ver. 25. *And every man that striveth for the mastery*, etc.] Either in running a race, or in wrestling; for the word here used agrees with both, and both are in the context referred to, nor has the apostle as yet done with his allusion to running in a race;

is temperate in all things; contains himself from venery, abstains from certain sorts of food, which tend to hinder the agility, or weaken the strength of the body; and indulges not himself in sloth and idleness, but exercises himself in various manners, that he may be prepared for running or wrestling: the apostle’s view in this, seems to be to strengthen some exhortations he had already given, to abstain from fornication, and the immoderate use of venery; to forbear eating things offered to idols, and not give themselves up to luxury and intemperance; for should they be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, they would be very unfit for their Christian race, or for wrestling with principalities and powers, and the discharging of the business of a Christian profession:

now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; they confine themselves to a certain diet and course of living, and abstain from things otherwise desirable to nature; and this they do for the sake of a fading crown, a crown of leaves, made of the boughs and leaves of olives, laurels, pine, etc. or of parsley, green or dried, as before observed ^{f162}:

but we an incorruptible; even eternal life; compared to a crown, for the riches, glory, and lustre of it; and as suitable to the character and dignity of saints, who are kings as well as priests unto God: it is called “incorruptible”, because it is so in its own nature; nor can it be corrupted by other things, as crowns even of gold may; nor shall any corrupt person wear it; the corruption of nature must be removed from the saints, yea, that frailty and mortality of human nature, which sometimes goes by the name of corruption, must be taken away, ere they can inherit this crown and

kingdom; nor will it ever fade away, as the corruptible crowns of the conquerors in these games did, and that in a very short time; but this will last for ever, and always continue in the same glory and lustre.

Ver. 26. *I therefore so run*, etc.] The apostle animates the Corinthians by his own example, telling them that he ran so as he exhorted them; he ran with cheerfulness and swiftness in the way marked out for him, looking to Jesus; continuing steadfast in the profession of his faith, and discharge of his duty as a Christian, and in preaching the Gospel as a minister; and nothing had he more at heart, than to finish his course with joy:

not as uncertainly; as one that knew not, or was in doubt about the way in which he should run, and so ran in and out, sometimes in the way, sometimes out of it; since it was clearly pointed out to him in the word of God: the allusion is to the white line which was drawn from the place the runners set out at to the goal; so that they did not run uncertainly, nor could they be at a loss to steer their course: nor did the apostle run, for what, as the Syriac version renders it, [w̄dy am, “is unknown”]: he knew what he ran for, for the incorruptible crown of glory, he knew the nature of it; nor was he uncertain as to the event and issue of his running; he knew that this crown was laid up safe and secure, that it would be given him, and he should wear it; he had no doubt at all about it; and with this certain knowledge both of the way and prize, and full assurance of faith and hope, he ran:

so fight I, not as one that beateth the air. The allusion is here to fighting with the fist, when, before the combat was entered on, the person used to swagger about, and beat about with his fists, striking the air with them, having no adversary before him; only showing what he could do if he had one, or when he should encounter: so did not the apostle, he did not fight with his own shadow, or a man of straw, or beat the empty air; but gave home blows to real adversaries, Satan, the world, and the flesh; the latter of which is particularly mentioned in the next verse.

Ver. 27. *But I keep under my body*, etc.] The allusion is still to fighters, who, by cuffing and boxing, give their antagonists black and blue eyes, which is the proper signification of the word here used: so it is said ^{f163} of Menedemus, that in questions or scholastic exercises, he was so vehement and pugnacious, that he never departed without *υπωπια φερων*, “carrying away black and blue eyes”. This is not to be understood by the apostle of

his natural body, and of his keeping it under by immoderate watchings, fastings, and labours, or by whipping and scourging, and lying upon the bare ground, and other such practices; but of the body of sin, the corruption of nature, and of that being laid under some restraints; of the mortifying the deeds of the body through the Spirit, of crucifying the affections with the lusts, of putting off the old man with his deeds, as concerning the former conversation, and of making no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof: it seems to be the same with what the Jews call ^{f164}, **wrxy çbwk**, “a subduing of a man’s evil concupiscence”: who is a strong man? they say ^{f165}, **wrxy ta çbwkh**, “he that subdues his corruption”, according to (~~2K62~~ Proverbs 16:32) and again ^{f166}

“the sons of Ulam were mighty and powerful men, **ˆwhyrxy ˆyçbk**, “subduing their corruptions”, as man that draws a bow with wisdom.”

And bring it into subjection; so as not to serve and obey it in the lusts thereof; but to have the ascendant of it, and government over it, that it does not, and cannot reign as it formerly did: the allusion is still to the combatant, who gets and keeps his antagonist under him, and has the command of him, and throws him on the ground, or drags him about at pleasure:

lest that by any means when I have preached to others; the Gospel of the grace of God, for their souls’ profit and advantage, to gain and save them; and have called upon them so to run, that they might receive and enjoy the incorruptible crown:

I myself should be a castaway, or rejected, or disapproved of; that is, by men: the apostle’s concern is, lest he should do anything that might bring a reproach on the Gospel; lest some corruption of his nature or other should break out, and thereby his ministry be justly blamed, and be brought under contempt; and so he be rejected and disapproved of by men, and become useless as a preacher: not that he feared he should become a reprobate, as the word is opposed to an elect person; or that he should be a castaway eternally, or be everlastingly damned; for he knew in whom he had believed, and was persuaded of his interest in the love of God, and that he was a chosen vessel of salvation, that could not be eternally lost: though supposing that this is his sense, and these his fears and concern, it follows not as neither that he was, so neither that he could be a lost and damned

person: the fears of the saints, their godly jealousies of themselves, and pious care that they be not lost, are not at all inconsistent with the firmness of their election, their security in Christ, and the impossibility of their final and total falling away; but on the contrary are overruled, and made use of by the Spirit of God, for their final perseverance in grace and holiness.