



Relinquishing Your Rights

No. 20
Series: 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

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Text

9 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? ² 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.

³ This is my defense to those who would examine me. ⁴ Do we not have the right to eat and drink? ⁵ Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? ⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

⁸ Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? ¹² If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

¹⁵ But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. ¹⁶ For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

Introduction

News headlines often report the sad and salacious stories of fraudulent pastors. For example, in the last couple years Texas mega-church pastor Robert Morris was in the news for his past sexual abuse of a minor that had come to light. He has since been convicted and will serve time in jail. But he is suing his church in order to be able to receive the retirement package he believes he is owed from the church – "\$600,000 per year for as long as he and his wife are living."¹

I can totally understand why stories like this present a clear obstacle in the way of the gospel for many people. Is organized religion just a scheme for hucksters to fleece the sheep? I get it.

However, I would want to suggest that not every person in Christian ministry is like this. The median total compensation for a full-time pastor of a Southern Baptist

church in America is \$75,000.² I believe there are a lot of pastors out there who are genuinely trying to serve the Lord and people and are not getting rich. Many lead pastors are even bi-vocational, meaning they work another job to subsidize their ministry. They are making sacrifices and giving up bigger opportunities in order to be faithful to Jesus and the flock he's called them to as under-shepherds. They are usually unknown and obscure. They don't make the headlines.

Today we're looking at a section of the Bible where one of Christianity's earliest leaders exemplifies something totally opposite of the negative stereotype. 1 Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul to a church that he helped start, a church which was still very immature and had many problems. He's working his way through addressing these problems: divisions, sexual immorality, members suing each other.

Last week he started talking about the question of eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. Underneath that issue Paul identified the real problem as one of selfishness. Many members of the body were just looking out for themselves, doing what they wanted to do, and not thinking of others' needs above their own. They thought they knew a lot. But we saw in ch. 8 that actually the more you learn of God the less you live for yourself and the more you love your brothers and sisters.

So "Paul has been dealing with people who asserted their [own] rights to the detriment of others. He has told them that this is wrong [in ch. 8]. He now proceeds [in ch. 9] to show that he himself has consistently applied this principle. He practices what he preaches."³ Paul himself has every reason to feel entitled, but instead he gives up his rights for the sake of the church. It's a beautiful example. In short, what we're going to see from this text today is just this: **ministers are to be models of selflessness.**

Let's pray...

Resume (vv. 1-3)

In vv. 1-3 we get a little bit of Paul's resume. Paul's resume. Paul puts forward his credentials in the form of four questions.

The first question is not so much particular to Paul. It's really the birthright of every born-again believer. It's coming on the heels of last week's discussion about the freedom to eat meat. Paul asks, "Am I not free?"

To be a Christian is to be free – free from condemnation, free from guilt, free from shame, free from the Law, free from scrupulosity, free from the pressure to perform or conform, free from worrying about what people think about you because you've heard God's irreversible verdict pronounced over you: Pardoned. Righteous! Accepted!! Loved!!!

Remember the first part of Luther's summary of the Christian life last week? "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none."⁴ John Calvin has a really helpful chapter in his *Institutes* entitled "Of Christian Liberty" where he says that "it forms a proper appendix to Justification, and is of no little service in understanding its force."⁵ Freedom is an appendage to the doctrine of justification.

In Christ, Paul (and every Christian, for that matter) is gloriously free! The Reformation was right! May we rediscover afresh in every generation... in every season... every day... every moment of our lives the amazing truth of justification by

grace through faith alone. Otherwise we are doomed to live in crippling slavery – *Oh no! Have I done enough? Is this okay? What if...?*

So Paul starts with a question that can be answered in the affirmative for every believer. “Am I not free?” But then his second question only applies to a dozen or so people in the history of the world. “Am I not an apostle?” The answer for Paul was Yes. He was officially commissioned by Jesus to represent him among the Gentiles and write inspired, authoritative, foundational truth for the Church. That’s what an Apostle is – a sent one, authorized.

The pre-requisite therefore of an Apostle is being an eye-witness of the resurrected Jesus. That’s why Paul asks next, “Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” Paul’s whole ministry was founded on the fact that he actually encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. He wasn’t self-appointed. Jesus chose to make one more delayed post-resurrection appearance to Paul and deputize him as his witness among far-off lands like Corinth. This is Paul’s office. He didn’t seek it. He didn’t attain it. Remember how he began this letter? “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus” (1:1a). What a line on a resume!

The fourth question gets at the subjective confirmation of the objective realities. “Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?” In other words, doesn’t the existence of the Corinthian church itself attest in some measure to the supernatural authority vested in Paul? “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.” Like a signet ring pressed in warm wax leaves an imprint, so the Corinthian church bears the stamp of Paul’s apostolic authority. They knew him. He came to them not with mere human speech, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (see 2:1-5).

Evidently, there were some around the Roman world (the “others” mentioned at the beginning of v. 2) and even perhaps some in the church at Corinth (maybe those who joined later?) who were questioning Paul’s credentials. But he tells them in v. 3 – “This is my defense to those who would examine me.”

I’ve heard of pastors who have been caught lying on their resumes, saying they had degrees they didn’t have. But Paul’s resume is legit. He has met the Lord and there is corroborating fruit in his life. Paul defends his integrity and the veracity of his resume... but, again, he does it first and foremost as a free person who doesn’t need to be defensive because he’s been acquitted in the only court that really matters. You can defend yourself without being defensive and insecure. I want to grow in that and pray you do too.

Rights (vv. 4-6)

So that’s vv. 1-3 – Paul’s resume. The next section – vv. 4-6 – gives us Paul’s rights. Paul’s rights. I have three diplomas in my office from institutions of higher learning where I received degrees in ministry. These are on my resume. I went and looked at them and they all say, “By the authority of the Trustees [or Board of Regents]... and upon the recommendation of the Faculty, Nathaniel R. Carter has been admitted to the degree of ____ and is entitled to all the rights and honors appertaining thereto.” Rights.

Paul has been personally commissioned by the Lord Jesus to go and preach the gospel and plant churches and strengthen them and write them letters settling disputes for

them and for all time. Paul's been called to a special ministry task. And along with that vocation comes certain rights, especially the right to be financially supported so he can focus on the work. Paul asks three questions that get at this right.

First, he asks, "Do we not have the right to eat and drink" (v. 4)? Are Apostles not allowed to eat and drink? If you are doing ministry, are you supposed to go hungry and thirsty? No, you have a right to have your physical needs met, which generally requires money.

It's instructive that Paul speaks of eating and drinking, for these are basic needs. He does not have in mind opulence or excess. Paul speaks in 1 Timothy 6:5-9 of those "who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain." He tells how "godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation." Food and clothing, eat and drink... that's all. But to have those basic needs covered is a right of those who give the majority of their time to leading in ministry. They shouldn't have to go without basic needs.

Second, he asks, "Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife" (v. 5a)? A few things to note in this question. (1) It says a "believing" wife. This is yet another proof, along with what Paul says in 7:39 about a widow being free to re-marry *as long as he is "in the Lord,"* that Christians can only date and marry other Christians. (2) This reminds us that marriage is not bad. The Apostles could have a "wife." Forced celibacy for religious leaders is a bad thing. "He who finds a wife finds a good thing" (Prov. 18:22). (3) A wife is not a right. Singleness can be good too. The right here is not to be married, but to bring your wife along with you in your mission work if you are married. Married couples should stay together and, as Paul said in 7:5, only be apart for very short and rare times. But think about it: that costs extra money. Not only does he have to eat, but his wife and presumably kids have to eat and drink too. This is saying that those in ministry leadership should be given enough to support their whole family.

Paul adds a comment to the end of this second question concerning his rights. He says, "...as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas." This seems to indicate that the other Apostles were all married and brought their families with them on their mission trips and were supported sufficiently to cover all their expenses. Even Cephas. Remember: Cephas is one of Peter's other names. We know Peter had a wife. How? Because Jesus healed his mother-in-law (see Mk. 1:30). So the supposedly first Pope was married. And look at the end of v. 5 even more carefully... We also know that Mary was not a perpetual virgin. Paul here mentions "the brothers of the Lord." Mark 6:3 tells us that Jesus' brothers' names were James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and he also had sisters.

Anyway, these are side-points. The main point Paul is making is that he has a right to have his needs met, and, if he had, one, his wife's and kids' needs met as he devotes himself to his apostolic ministry.

His third question here reinforces his point. "Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?" Apparently, the Corinthians knew about Barnabas, which is fascinating to me because Paul and Barnabas had split up back in Acts 15. And Paul didn't get to Corinth until Acts 18. But Paul must have told them fond stories of Barnabas. Maybe at some point Barnabas had even passed through

Corinth? We don't know, but we do know that their parting of ways in Acts 15 wasn't an unreconcilable difference that made them enemies. Are there any Christians out there that you can't talk about with fondness, even if you have had some sharp disagreements? That's another side-point to ponder.

But again, the main point is that it seems that Paul and Barnabas had a right to be supported in ministry, but often had to work another job to support themselves. This is where Acts 18 is helpful in giving us some of the backstory. It tells us that when Paul first arrived in Corinth he worked as a tentmaker, for that was his skilled trade. There weren't enough believers yet or they weren't mature enough yet to be able to support Paul. So he worked all week making tents to provide for his needs. "And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath" (Acts 18:4). But "[w]hen Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word" (Acts 18:5), meaning that they arrived with money collected from the church in Philippi that allowed Paul to give himself full-time to the ministry of the Word. So Paul ministered for a while in Corinth with no financial support so he had to work as a tent-maker. But as soon as financial support came in (not from the church in Corinth, but from an outside source) he was happy and quick to quit tentmaking and be fully occupied with the work of ministry. As an ordained Apostle Paul has a right to refrain from working a secular job for a living, even though he doesn't always utilize this right (more on that to come).

Reasons (vv. 7-14)

But next, Paul gives us several reasons why financially supporting people like him is legitimate. So Paul's resume in vv. 1-3; Paul's rights in vv. 4-6; and now Paul's reasons for positing those rights in vv. 7-14. In case you ever wondered why churches and ministries ask for money and after they get it they don't just give it all away to the poor, but use significant portions of it to support people working in the ministry, here are 5 arguments that Paul lays out to explain it. He argues from (1) common practice (v. 7), (2) scriptural precept (vv. 8-10), (3) intrinsic justice (vv. 11-12), (4) Jewish custom (v. 13), and finally (5) from Christ's command (v. 14).⁶

So v. 7... Paul says everyone understands that this is how it works in other fields. He cites three examples. (A) The military – "Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?" If you're going to have an army to provide for the common defense it only makes sense that you would make sure they have rations and uniforms and barracks... An enlisted soldier in the U.S. Army gets food, housing, healthcare, plus base pay between \$30,000 to \$50,000 a year. Nobody bats an eye at that. It makes sense that they shouldn't have to serve at their own expense.

(B) Horticulture – "Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit?" I transplanted a raspberry bush into my back yard a few years ago. I prune it. I tie it to a trellis. Nobody objects to me picking and popping into my mouth the juicy red berries when they ripen.

(C) Shepherding – Paul asks, "Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?" You see what Paul is doing, right? There's a common understanding that soldiers don't serve for free, vinedressers can have snacks in the field, and milkers can have a drink from the bucket. "In the same way, Paul, who guarded the Corinthian church like a soldier, tended it like a vineyard, and cared for it like a shepherd, had every right to make his living as a minister."⁷ It's just fits with common practice.

But Paul's argument has more backing than that. Supporting ministers comes from (2) scriptural precept. Look at v. 8. "Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law [the OT Scriptures] say the same?" Then he quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4 – "For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.'" Make sure you understand the picture here. Back then they would harvest the grain by cutting the stalks and all. And then they would take this to a hard surface area and lay them down. Then they would have oxen walk in circles on top of these stalks over and over again to trample it down and separate the grain from the stalks. It's a form of threshing. And in God's Law it says that you can't muzzle the animal while it's doing this work to keep it from eating some of the grain. The animal has a right to get his sustenance as he's doing his work.

In v. 10 Paul asks, "Does he [that is, Moses] not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop." In other words, this isn't just a Law looking out for animals. This is a principle laid down for people, ensuring that those who work hard have a right to get their needs met from their work. Martin Luther said it was obvious that this was not written for oxen because "oxen can't read"!⁸ It's a Scriptural precept that ministers shouldn't be muzzled while they work.

The third reason Paul gives is found in vv. 11-12. It's been called (3) intrinsic justice. "If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?" Spiritual work, laboring in preaching and prayer and care for the eternal souls of the Corinthians, deserves at least material support given from those who benefit spiritually. It's a sowing and reaping principle that's just fair. The Corinthians understood this and it seems that they had supported others. Verse 12 – "If others share in this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?" The point being: material support for spiritual work is a "rightful claim." We'll come back to the end of v. 12 in a bit.

The fourth reason Paul lays out for a minister's right to be financially supported is (4) Jewish custom (v. 13). "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?" In the OT the Levites in return for their service in the Tabernacle/Temple were provided for. When a worshipper came with an animal sacrifice, a portion of it was to go to feeding the priests. They didn't have their own inheritance in the nation of Israel because the rest of the tribes of Israel was supposed to take care of their needs in return for their service. Even in pagan temples, this principle was well-understood.

So Paul makes a convincing case for the right of ministers to be financially supported. He argues from (1) common practices, (2) scriptural precept, (3) intrinsic justice, (4) Jewish custom, and lastly the clincher: (5) Christ command. We get this concept of minister's being supported from Jesus himself!

See v. 14? "In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." Every Christian is to proclaim the gospel, but there are those who have dedicated the bulk of their time to doing so and spearheading the effort. Here Paul shows that he had some familiarity with the Gospels. In Matthew 10 when Jesus sends out the Twelve on a mission and in Luke 10 where he sends out the Seventy-Two, he instructs them to expect that they will be provided for through the hospitality and support of those to whom they minister. It's a great act of

faith. Jesus says, “The laborer deserves his food” or “The laborer deserves his wages.” He doesn’t deserve to get rich at the expense of others. But he deserves to be cared for with lodging and food and necessities. This is the teaching of Jesus himself, who was supported in his ministry from the means of others (see Lk. 8:3). It seems he ceased being a carpenter and his several of his disciples ceased being fishermen for the three years of his public ministry of teaching.

“The laborer deserves his wages.” This saying from Jesus is quoted by Paul in 1 Timothy 5 along with a citation of the Dt. 25:4 passage about ox not being muzzled. There he applies it not just to apostles like himself, but to pastors who stay and minister in local churches. He says, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1Tim. 5:17). An elder is another word for pastor. The idea is that each local church is supposed to have multiple elder/pastors. Each of these elders is supposed to be shown honor. Many of them will have other jobs like engineers or consultants or restaurant managers or doctors and serve in the office of elder on the side. But some may be devoted full-time to labor in preaching and teaching. And they are worthy of double honor, meaning respect *and* financial support. They are not mere hirelings. As D.A. Carson says, it’s better to talk like this: “The church does not pay its ministers; rather, it provides them with resources so that they are able to serve freely.”⁹

Today we don’t have Apostles any more. But from passages like 1 Timothy 5 or Galatians 6:6 which says, “Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches,” we see that the principle of financial support for dedicated spiritual ministry is legitimate and beneficial to the health of the church. From other passages like 3 John 5-8 we also see that we should support missionaries/evangelists who go out for the sake of the Name to cross boundaries and take the gospel into un or under-reached places.

Relinquishing (vv. 15-18)

Okay, so that’s a lot of explaining from Paul on why he and others have the right to get material support so they can focus on ministry. Hopefully that was instructive and helpful. But that’s not even Paul’s *main* point in this passage. His larger point is that even though it is a well-documented right, Paul is willing to relinquish it for the sake of others. Resume, Rights, Reasons, Relinquishing.

Paul clearly had the right to be supported by the Corinthians for his work. But he relinquished it. We see this hinted at in v. 6, stated clearly at the end of v. 12 – “Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” – , and then elaborated on in vv. 15-18.

Verse 15 – “But I have made no use of any of these rights.” He’s made an undeniable case that he has these rights, but with the Corinthians he has not made use of them. Who does that?! Who voluntarily gives up their own rights? It’s almost unheard of!

And it’s not like Paul is being passive aggressive here and trying to get the Corinthians to feel bad and send him money. He says, “...nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision.” Paul isn’t trying to get their money. He just wants to change their hearts. He wants them to learn from him to be **selfless**.

It’s not clear exactly why Paul didn’t receive financial support from Corinth. At first, it may have been simply because they couldn’t afford it. I know many pastors who

work hard, but their congregations just aren't capable of supporting them due to size or socio-economic factors. A good pastor will do whatever it takes including raising outside support and/or being co-vocational. It seems however that by this point there were enough givers with means in the church in Corinth to support workers, and they did (see v. 12). But some have postulated that the Corinthians had a patronage mindset, adopted from the prevailing culture around them that paid for wisdom teachers to impress them with their oratory and make them feel important. Paul didn't want to play into that and let them feel like they owned him. So the situation is hard to piece together exactly.

And the logic Paul uses in this section is a bit hard to follow. He says, "For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel."

I think what Paul is essentially saying is that he is not doing this for the money. He is not doing it to get something from others or even from God. "There is in [his] heart as it were a burning fire shut up in [his] bones" and he cannot hold it in (see Jer. 20:9). He will preach the gospel no matter what, no matter if he has to work full-time as a tentmaker. It's such good news and it has so grabbed his soul – the story of a Savior who has stooped so low to sweep a sinner like him up into eternal life, the freeness of the grace of God that comes to him without any cost, he can't help but pass it on freely. This isn't a career choice for Paul. It's just an inexpressible gift that he's been given to pass on to others.

Paul technically has rights. It would be nice if the Corinthians graciously met his needs. But that's not going to stop Paul from giving everything he has for their spiritual good. He is willing to sacrifice, to forego, to relinquish his rights to serve the church. This is what good ministry leaders do, who have been gripped by the gospel. They don't clamor for their rights. They give them up.

I was thinking of Barnabas, who was mentioned back in v. 6. The first time we're introduced to him in the Bible in Acts 4, we see him relinquishing his rights. Barnabas had a right to personal property, but he gave that up for the sake of the church.

There are all sorts of rights that ministers could point to and stand up for, but they are willing to lay them down, be trampled all over, trust God and not assert themselves, not be defensive when slandered, not pout when unappreciated, not guard themselves but pour themselves out for others... because they know they ultimately serve the One who did not consider his divine rights something to be grasped onto but laid them down to save us (see Ph. 2:6).

We can point to instances of ministry leaders being selfish. I'm sure Paul at times still struggled with this. But I hope you've experienced something of the sweetness of a ministry leader who was not in it for "shameful gain" (see 1Pe. 5:2) but for whom the free offering of the free gospel was its own reward.

Conclusion

Now, lastly, the main main point is not that ministers have rights to be supported, nor that ministers should relinquish their rights. **Ministers are to be models of**

selflessness, which means that this kind of selflessness expected of those in leadership is supposed to be emulated by all members of the church. Paul's saying that he has done this because he wants them to do this kind of stuff too.

This may be the main point of this whole book. Remember how it started, with Paul confronting the *I* mentality rampant in the church? "*I'm* of Paul." "*I'm* of Apollos." "*I'm* of Cephas." There is no *I* in church. It's a thread that runs throughout. Remember ch. 6? Where some members were taking other members to court? What does Paul say to them? "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded" (6:7). Stop caring so much about your own rights! Lay them down! Last week he said we should be willing to never eat meat again for the sake of a brother!! It's going to be the underlying theme of so much of what's still to come in this letter. Christians, everyday members of the church, should be **selfless**.

But we are obsessed with standing up for our own rights. Everything about the world these days screams at us to speak up for yourself, love yourself, care for yourself, put boundaries around yourself. And I'm not saying there aren't some elements of wisdom in this and it's not complicated at times. But overall, we should be people who are laying aside our own rights for others. How much is that part of your calculations?

Have you let go of your preferences for things like music or culture or programs to be a member of a church? Have you regularly given up your right to a nice, quiet evening at home after a hard day's work at the office in order to practice hospitality or go meet with a struggling fellow member? What have you said No to in your budget so that you can give to the church? Have you sacrificed your right to mobility for the sake of mission? How are you not making full use of your rights for the sake of others in the body?

And the deeper question for all of us is – Why are we trying so hard to protect ourselves and look out for ourselves? Why? Maybe for some people it's a compensation mechanism for feeling small, some insecurity, and so you feel like you have to make yourself big. Maybe you were a middle child who was overlooked and you feel like you have to assert yourself to be noticed. Maybe you were abused and the way you cope is to do everything you can to make sure you are never, ever taken advantage of again. Maybe you grew up in a ministry family and felt like you never were able to have the things other kids had and so there's a chip on your shoulder that drives you to self-protect. Or you grew up poor that makes you fear the future and hoard. Maybe you were told you were not as good as someone else or not smart and so you're touting your own achievements. Maybe you've been deeply disappointed and hurt and you've closed yourself off to try to prevent it from happening again. Really think and do some deep soul work: what is it at your core that's feeding this insistence on sticking up for yourself, protecting yourself... keeping you focused on self and unable to be selfless?

And here's the antidote: the gospel. You don't have to stand up for your own rights when God has declared you righteous.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that you are righteous in Christ? You have all the riches, all the affirmation, all the security, all the love you could ever need and so you can "let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also." You can relinquish your rights and stop clamoring for self-preservation... you can lose your life because Christ gave his for you.

The Lord's Table

That's what this Table is a portrait of. For any member of this church or a member of another church of like faith that is visiting with us today – Come! “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost” (Is. 55:1). It cost him dearly, but it's totally free for us... He has infinitely and eternally provided our deepest needs for us.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, November 2, 2025. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/texas/news/robert-morris-gateway-church-retirement-money-arbitration/>

² <https://research.lifeway.com/compensation-data/>

³ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 [1958]), 131.

⁴ Martin Luther, *A Treatise on Christian Liberty* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957 [1520]), 7.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989 [1845; 1559]), 2:131; Book III, Chapter XIX, Section 1.

⁶ From David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 153-56.

⁷ Stephen T. Um, *1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross*, *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 164.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy in Luther's Works*, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1960 [1525]), 9:248.

⁹ D.A. Carson, *When Jesus Confronts the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 125.