

9:1 The Apostle's Workmanship

My Workmanship in the Lord.

Chrysostom: The really great thing was that the Corinthian Christians were Paul's workmanship in the Lord. Even Judas was an apostle and saw Christ, but because he did not have the work of an apostle, these things were of no benefit to him. Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 21.2.1

9:2 The Seal of Paul's Apostleship

He Became Everyone's Apostle.

Chrysostom: Once again, Paul makes his point by concession, for the whole world had him as its apostle. Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 21.2.3

9:3 A Defense

9:4 The Apostle's Rights

9:5 The Other Apostles' Practice

Accompanied by a Wife.

Clement of Alexandria: The apostles concentrated on undistracted preaching and took their wives around as Christian sisters rather than as spouses, to be their fellow ministers to the women of the household, so that the gospel would reach them without causing scandal. Stromateis 3.53.3.7

The Ministry of Sister Women.

Augustine: When his identity has been established, he shows that the privileges granted to the other apostles are his also, namely, exemption from manual labor and livelihood in recompense for his preaching as the Lord appointed. This is stated most clearly according to the verses where St. Paul argues explicitly that faithful women, possessing the goods of this world, went along with the apostles and ministered to them from their own supplies that the servants of God might lack none of those commodities which constitute the necessities of life.... Certain persons, not understanding this passage, have interpreted it as "wife." The obscurity of the Greek word deceived them, since, in Greek, the same

word is used for wife and woman. Yet the apostle has placed the words in such a way that people should not be deceived, since he says not merely “a woman” but “a sister woman,” and not “to take in marriage” but “to take about.” *The Work of Monks* 2.8

The Right to Be Accompanied.

Augustine: To what right does he refer unless it be to the one which the Lord gave to those whom he sent to preach the kingdom of heaven when he said: “Eat what they have; for the laborer deserves his wages”?⁹ He offered himself as an exponent of this privilege. Very faithful women attended to the necessities of his life at their own expense. *The Work of Monks* 7.10

9:6 Paul’s Livelihood

Live by the Gospel.

Augustine: The Lord directed those who preach the gospel to live by the gospel, that is, to maintain at the expense of the faithful that life for which food and clothing are essential. *The Work of Monks* 9.12

9:7 Serving as a Soldier

A Soldier Against the Demonic.

Chrysostom: The apostleship was much more dangerous than being a soldier. For their warfare was not just with men but with demons as well. The apostles were both soldiers and husbandmen and shepherds, not of the earth, nor of irrational animals, nor in such wars as are perceived by the senses, but of rational souls and in battle array with the demons. *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 21.4.1

The Propriety of Receiving Support.

Augustine: The church has its own soldiers and its own provincial officers ... its vineyard and its planters, its flock and its shepherds.... Thus some are rightly fed and clothed at the expense of the charitable rich. They accept nothing for their own necessities except from those who sell their goods. They are not to be judged and condemned by the more perfect members of Christ who furnish their own needs with their own hands—a higher virtue which the apostle strongly commends. ² They in turn ought not to condemn as Christians of lower grade those from whose resources they are supplied.... The servants of God who live by selling the honest works of their own hands could, with much less impropriety, condemn those

from whom they receive nothing than could those others who are unable to work with their hands because of some bodily weakness yet who condemn the very ones at whose expense they live. Letter 157, To Hilarius.³

9:8 Scripture's Teaching

9:9 Not Muzzling an Ox

God's Care for the Apostles.

Origen: God's care was not only for the oxen ⁵ but more so for the apostles, for whose sake he uttered these words. On First Principles 2.4.2.⁶

An Ox Treading Grain.

Chrysostom: Why does Paul mention this, when he could have used the example of the priests? ⁷ The reason is that he wanted to prove his case beyond any shadow of doubt. If God cares about oxen, how much more will he care about the labor of teachers? Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 21.5.⁸

9:10 Speaking for the Apostles' Sake

9:11 Sowing Spiritual Good

Spiritual Good and Material Benefit.

Chrysostom: Paul points out that those who contribute to their teachers receive more than they give. Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 21.6.¹¹

Manual Labor Justly Substituted.

Augustine: Paul emphasizes the fact that his fellow apostles were not transgressing in any way when they did not engage in manual labor to provide the necessities of life, but, as the Lord directed, living on the gospel, they accepted, without offering payment, bodily nourishment from those to whom they in turn furnished spiritual nourishment without demanding payment. The Work of Monks 7.¹²

9:12 *Giving Up One's Right*

9:13 *Sharing in the Offerings*

Food from the Temple.

Chrysostom: The case of the apostles was much stronger than that of the priests. The priesthood was an honor, but the apostles were exposed to dangers, slaughters and violent deaths. In saying “We have seen spiritual good among you” he points to the storms, the dangers, the snares, the unspeakable evils endured in preaching. But Paul was unwilling to despise the things of the old law or to exalt what belonged to him. He even provided his own possessions. He reckoned their value not from the dangers but from the greatness of God’s gift. He did not say “if we have exposed ourselves to danger” but “if we have sown spiritual things among you.” Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 22.1.14

9:14 *Their Living by the Gospel*

The Right of Support.

Augustine: The apostle says this [here and in 2 Timothy 2:3–6] so that Timothy might understand that what he took from those for whom he was, as it were, fighting, and whom he was cultivating as a vine, or feeding as a flock, was not a sign of begging but an acknowledgment of a right. The Work of Monks 15.16

9:15a *Not Using Rights*

The Clarity of the Text Exceeds Its Explanations.

Augustine: “The Lord directed that those who preach the gospel should have their living from the gospel. But I for my part have appealed to none of these rights.” ... What is clearer than this? What is more definite? My only fear is that, when I discuss the passage in an attempt to explain it, I may obscure that which is of itself patent and forceful. For, they who do not understand these words, or pretend that they do not understand them, understand mine much less. The Work of Monks 9.1

Look to the Saints for Applications.

Augustine: “For the laborer deserves his hire.”² He showed that this practice³ was permitted, though not commanded, lest perhaps a disciple who took some compensation for his personal needs from those to

whom he was preaching might think he was doing wrong. That it was more commendable to omit this practice is shown clearly in the life of the apostle ... [who] declared: "Nevertheless I have not used this right." ... He possessed the right, but he did not bind his followers by a command. Since we are, then, unable to comprehend many passages, we gather from the deeds of the saints how to understand those passages which may easily be misinterpreted if reference is not made to the example set by the saints. On Lying 15.30.⁴

9:15b *Willing to Die*

Willingness to Die.

Origen: "It is better that I die" than that they ravish and plunder some of my brothers and by sly verbal deception lead captive the "little children" and sucklings in Christ. Homilies on Genesis 4.6.⁵

9:16 *Necessity of Preaching the Gospel*

9:17 *Entrusted with a Commission*

The Dispensation of the Word.

Origen: What then shall I do, to whom the dispensation of the Word is committed? Although I am an "unprofitable servant,"¹⁰ I have, nevertheless, received from the Lord the commission "to distribute the measure of wheat to the master's servants."¹¹ Homilies on Genesis 10.¹²

In Charity of Spirit.

Ambrose: Surely it is better to merit a reward than to serve as a steward. Let us not be bound by the yoke of slavery, but let us serve in charity of spirit. Letter 47.¹³

Dispensing and Partaking of Salvation.

Augustine: Up to now I am so far restored in that glory that I confess I am ignorant not only how near I come to it but even whether I shall come to it at all. It is true I am a dispenser of eternal salvation along with my other innumerable fellow servants. "For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward." To be a dispenser of that salvation by word and sacrament is not at all the same as to be a partaker of it. Letter 261, To Audax.¹⁴

9:18 *The Reward of Preaching*

Reward.

Chrysostom: What can equal preaching? For it makes men vie even with the angels themselves. Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 22.3.15

9:19 *That I Might Win the More*

Free from All, Slave to All.

Origen: The fact that he is completely free makes Paul the exemplary apostle. For it is possible to be free of immorality but a slave to anger, to be free of greed but a slave to boasting, to be free of one sin but a slave to another. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3.43.1–5.1

Losing a Part to Gain All.

Cyril of Alexandria: So also the blessed Paul “became all things to all men,” not in order that he might gain some sort of advantage but that, with the loss of a part, he might gain all. Letter 76.3

9:20 *As One Under the Law*

Not Being Under the Law.

Chrysostom: Paul did not become a Jew in reality but only in appearance. How could it have been otherwise, since he was so determined to convert them and deliver them from their predicament? Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 22.5.5

Not a Deception.

Augustine: Paul was not pretending to be what he is not but showing compassion. Letter 82, To Jerome.6

Thinking Sympathetically.

Augustine: A person who nurses a sick man becomes, in a sense, sick himself, not by pretending to have a fever but by thinking sympathetically how he would like to be treated if he were sick himself. Letter 75, To Jerome.7

9:21 *As One Outside the Law*

Putting Oneself in the Other's Place.

Augustine: He did this by compassion, not by lying. For each one becomes like him whom he wants to help when such great mercy prevails as that each one would wish for himself if he were in the same misery. And so he becomes like the other—not by deceiving him but by putting himself in the other's place. Against Lying 12.10

9:22a *Winning the Weak*

Not a Lie.

Augustine: This is correctly interpreted to mean that he, not by lying but by sympathy, brought it about that he enabled their conversion by his own great love which made it seem as though he himself were afflicted with that evil of which he wished to heal them. On Lying 21.11

9:22b *Becoming All to All*

Christ as Pattern of Empathy.

Cyril of Jerusalem: Everywhere the Savior becomes "all things to all men." To the hungry, bread; to the thirsty, water; to the dead, resurrection; to the sick, a physician; to sinners, redemption. Sermon on the Paralytic 10.12

Paul the Imitator of Christ.

Ambrose: He who did not think it robbery to be equal with God took the nature of a slave. He became all things to all men to bring salvation to all. Paul, an imitator of him, lived as if outside the law while remaining accountable to the law. He spent his life for the advantage of those he wished to win. He willingly became weak for the weak in order to strengthen them. He ran the race to overtake them. Letter 54.13

9:22c *Saving Some*

To Save Some.

Chrysostom: Paul became all things to all men, not in the expectation that he would win everybody but that he might save at least some. It was not possible for all the seed to be saved, but neither could it be that all of it should perish. Someone as ardently zealous as Paul was sure to have some success at least. Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 22.5.15

9:23 *Sharing in the Gospel's Blessings*

For the Sake of the Gospel.

Origen: Only someone as mature in faith as the apostle Paul could say this. A sinner could never talk in this way. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3.43.49–50.16

Content to Share.

Chrysostom: Do you perceive Paul's humility, how in the recompense of rewards he places himself as one of the many, even though he had exceeded all the others in his labors? It is obvious that his reward would be greater also, but he does not attempt to claim the first prize. On the contrary, he is content simply to share with the others the crowns which are laid up for them. Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 22.5.17

9:24 *Obtaining the Prize*

Greatness of Soul.

Gregory of Nyssa: As far as you extend your efforts in behalf of piety, so far will the greatness of your soul extend through efforts and toils toward what the Lord urges us. On the Christian Mode of Life.⁴

The Diligence Required to Win.

Chrysostom: Paul says this not because he thinks that only one person will be saved but because he wants to point out how much diligence is required in order to succeed. It is not enough merely to believe and then contend in any which way. Unless we have run our race in such a way as to be blameless and to come near to the prize, it will not benefit us. Even if you think you are perfect in your knowledge you have still

not obtained everything, so you must continue to run in order to obtain the prize. Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 23.1.5

Willing and Running by Grace.

Augustine: It is not from the one who wills nor from the one that runs but from God who has mercy that we obtain what we hope for and reach what we desire. Esau was unwilling and did not run. Had he been willing and had he run, he would have obtained the help of God who by calling him would have given him the power both to will and to run. To Simplician 10.7

9:25 *An Imperishable Wreath*

Athletes of Self-Control.

Clement of Alexandria: No effort, no crown! Today there are people who place the widow above the virgin in terms of self-control, because the widow has rejected a pleasure which she once enjoyed. Stromateis 3.101.4–5.8

The Combat.

Cyprian: This combat was foretold by the prophets, engaged in by the Lord and carried on by the apostles. Letter 10.4.9

The Athlete.

Ambrose: You are an athlete. Come to grips with your opponent, not with your head but with your arms. Six Days of Creation 6.10

The Rules.

Basil: No one is crowned except he strive lawfully. Give Heed to Thyself.11

Refreshed by Hope.

Augustine: When we enter upon the way of the Lord, let us fast from the vanity of this present life and refresh ourselves with the hope of the future life, not focusing our heart on things here but feasting it on things above. Sermon 263.12

9:26 *Not Beating the Air*

Into the Arena.

Ambrose: Like an athlete he comes last into the arena. He lifts his eyes to heaven.... He sees that his whole task awaits him.... He chastises his body so that it will not defeat him in the contest. He anoints it with the oil of mercy. He practices daily exhibitions of virtue. He smears himself with dust. He runs with assurance to the goal of the course. He aims his blows, he darts his arms, but not at empty spaces.... Earth is man's training ground, heaven his crown. Letter 49.14

Parrying Blows.

Ambrose: Like a good athlete, Paul knew how to parry the blows of the opposing powers and even to strike them as they advanced to the attack. Paradise 12.56.15

This World and the Next.

Jerome: So run in this world as to obtain in the next. Against the Pelagians 1.16

9:27 *Not Being Disqualified*

Let the Soul Command the Body.

Jerome: Let our soul be in command and our body in subjection. Then Christ will come immediately and make his dwelling with us. Homily 9.18

Behavioral Change Required.

Chrysostom: Here Paul is implying that the Corinthians are subject to the lusts of the belly and abandon themselves to it, fulfilling their own greediness under a pretense of perfection. If Paul, who had taught so many, was afraid of being rejected at the end, what can we say? Mere belief is not enough; we must behave in a way which is blameless if we hope to inherit salvation. Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 23.2.20

Paul's Need for Self-Discipline.

Chrysostom: If Paul—a man of such caliber and stature, who traversed the whole world like a winged creation, who proved superior to bodily necessities and was privileged to hear those secret words that no

one else to this day has heard—if he wrote these words, “I punish my body and bring it into subjection lest while preaching to others I myself become disqualified,” if then that man, the object of so great favor, despite such conspicuous prowess felt the need to pommel his body, bring it into subjection, submit it to the authority of the soul and place its impulses under the virtue of the soul ... what then would we say, deprived as we are of these virtues and with nothing to show in addition to this beyond deep indifference? After all, this war admits of no truce, does it? It has no set time for the assault, does it? Homilies on Genesis; 22.22.²¹

Distinguishing the Justified Self from the Evil Consequences of Free Acts.

Augustine: Paul chastises what is of him and not what is himself. For what is of him is one thing, what is himself is another. He chastises what is of him so that he, being just, may bring about the death of bodily wantonness. Against Julian 24.²²