

CHAPTER 9



In 1 Corinthians 9, St. Paul continues his theme of self-sacrifice from chapter eight by using himself as an example. He begins by re-asserting his apostleship: he is an apostle, he has seen the Resurrected Christ, and he has served as an apostle to the Corinthians; in fact, they are the seal of his apostleship (9:1-2). Despite these noble credentials however, St. Paul sacrifices in very tangible ways: he does not receive food from the church (9:4); he does not have a wife (who would not only provide companionship, but would also receive support from churches) (9:5); and he does not receive any money from the church in Corinth (9:6).

Here is St. Paul's point: he has the right to demand all of these things - as he says, it is no great thing to reap material things since he sows spiritual things (9:11) - but he refuses to use this right so that he does not hinder the gospel of Christ (9:12). Even though priests receive food from the temple (9:13), and the Lord Himself commanded that gospel preachers be supported for their work (9:14), St. Paul refuses any financial support so that no one can accuse him of preaching solely for material gain (9:15).

It should be noted that St. Paul sees no reason to boast about preaching the gospel of Christ: he is simply fulfilling the stewardship with which he's been entrusted (9:17), and in fact, proclaims "woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (9:16)! What, then, is his reward for this work? Significantly, St. Paul uses the freedom that his renunciation of his rights provides him to become a servant to all people - a Jew under the law to those under the law, and as one not under the law to those who are not under the law - so that by becoming all things to all people, he might save some (9:19-22).

Just think about this: St. Paul sacrifices himself so that he might share the blessings of the gospel with others (9:23)! As Origen notes, only someone mature in faith could do such a thing.

St. Paul now returns the focus of being self-sacrificing onto the Corinthian Christians by using the example of an athlete competing in a race or competing in a fight. Such a person lives a life of temperance and self-sacrifice so that he or she might win the contest, and they do this for a mere "perishable crown" (9:26); St. Paul encourages the Corinthians to train and compete in such a way that each of them wins the imperishable crown of salvation (9:25, 26). As an example, St. Paul himself sacrifices diligently and with confidence so that he - even after preaching to others - does not become disqualified from winning the imperishable crown (9:26-27).



TODAY'S SPECIAL: SACRIFICE FOR OTHERS

For most Orthodox workers - both clergy and laypersons - working for the benefit of others involves significant sacrifice. Priests give significant amounts of their time, often sacrificing time with their families and time for relaxation, to serve the people in their parish during times of need and crisis, as well as their work inside the church.

Lay ministry can also be a deeply sacrificial life. Most lay workers receive little or no pay for their labor (this includes some who work full time in lay ministry), and they often pay the expenses for their work out of their own pockets.

Why do Orthodox Christians live such sacrificial lives? In order to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and the worshipful life of His Church, with as many people as possible. We believe Orthodox Christianity is a pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46), and we give our all in order to share it with others.

You may not be called to full-time ministry (although you may, and should certainly pray to discern if you are), but as an Orthodox Christian you are called to do *something* to serve others. What can you do with your time and resources to bring others into a transforming relationship with God and His Church?

