Paul’s Motives Examined

1 Corinthians 9

Upon meeting a pastor, he asked me what kind of car I had. At the time I had and Infiniti.

I remember this older, wiser, pastor once saying to me…

“Anthony, as pastor of a church like Bonney Lake Community, you are allowed to have a Ford, a Chevy, a Buick, a Dodge, or a Nissan, possibly even a Toyota, but I am not sure you can own an Infiniti.”

For the record, the year was probably 2007 and it was a 1992 g20 that I had bought for $2200, because one of my best friends and mechanic was an Infiniti tech.

Also, for the record, the older, wiser, pastor was joking…or was he?

Have you ever had someone question your motives?

In 1st Corinthians 9 Paul is addressing the fact that the people in Corinth are basically questioning his authority, his expertise, and his authenticity. Some seemed to believe that he was taking advantage of their hospitality. This leads Paul to say.

9 Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven’t I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn’t it because of my work that you belong to the Lord? 2 Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you. You yourselves are proof that I am the Lord’s apostle.

3 This is my answer to those who question my authority (who examine me). 4 Don’t we have the right to live in your homes and share your meals? 5 Don’t we have the right to bring a believing wife with us as the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers do, and as Peter does? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves?

7 What soldier has to pay his own expenses? What farmer plants a vineyard and doesn’t have the right to eat some of its fruit? What shepherd cares for a flock of sheep and isn’t allowed to drink some of the milk? 8 Am I expressing merely a human opinion, or does the law say the same thing? 9 For the law of Moses says, “You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.” Was God thinking only about oxen when he said this? 10 Wasn’t he actually speaking to us? Yes, it was written for us, so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest.

11 Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren’t we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink? 12 If you support others who preach to you, shouldn’t we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ.

13 Don’t you realize that those who work in the temple get their meals from the offerings brought to the temple? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings. 14 In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it. 15 Yet I have never used any of these rights. And I am not writing this to suggest that I want to start now. In fact, I would rather die than lose my right to boast about preaching without charge. 16 Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn’t preach the Good News!

17 If I were doing this on my own initiative, I would deserve payment. But I have no choice, for God has given me this sacred trust. 18 What then is my pay? It is the opportunity to preach the Good News without charging anyone. That’s why I never demand my rights when I preach the Good News.

1 Corinthians 9:1-18 NLT

This passage has led some to wonder if pastors should be paid. After all, if the Apostle Paul wasn’t demanding his rights, wouldn’t the most honorable ministry be the one without any compensation?

Maybe…But is that what this scripture is about? Those who know your Bibles, know that the apostle Paul, in addition to his missionary work, did a little “tent making.”

I will propose that he did this for two main reasons, the first reason was to supplement his income. The second was to help gain the respect of those who had no idea how hard ministry was. Paul once explained his hardship as a minister.

“I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. 24 Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. 26 I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. 27 I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

28 Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?”

2 Corinthians 11:23-29 NLT

Yes, but that was then you say. Being a minister isn’t that taxing now days. It’s not even a real job.

According to statistics about pastors…

72% of the pastors report working between 55 to 75 hours per week. (Pre-Covid-19)

84% of pastors feel they are on call 24/7.

80% believe pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families. Many pastor's children do not attend church now because of what the church has done to their parents.

65% of pastors feel their family lives in a "glass house" and fear they are not good enough to meet expectations.

23% of pastors report being distant to their family.

78% of pastors report having their vacation and personal time interrupted with ministry duties or expectations.

35% of pastors report the demands of the church denies them from spending time with their family.

24% of pastor's families resent the church and its effect on their family.

22% of pastor's spouses reports the ministry places undue expectations on their family.

66% of church members expect a minister and family to live at a higher moral standard than themselves.

53% of pastors report that the seminary did not prepare them for the ministry.

90% of pastors report the ministry was completely different than what they thought it would be like before they entered the ministry.

57% of pastors being unable to pay their bills.

53% of pastors are concerned about their future family financial security.

75% of pastors report significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry.

54% of pastors find the role of a pastor overwhelming.

35% of pastors battle depression or fear of inadequacy.

26% of pastors report being over fatigued.

70% of pastors report they have a lower self-image now than when they first started.

70% of pastors do not have someone they consider to be a close friend.

27% of pastors report not having anyone to turn to for help in a crisis situation.

57% of pastors feel fulfilled but yet discouraged, stressed, and fatigued.

The profession of “Pastor” is near the bottom of a survey of the most-respected professions, just above “car salesman”.

71% of churches have no plan for a pastor to receive a periodic sabbatical.

66% of churches have no lay counseling support.

Only 1 out of every 10 pastors will actually retire as a pastor.

According to the Schaeffer Institute, 70 percent of pastors constantly fight depression, and 71 percent are burned out. Meanwhile, 72 percent of pastors say they only study the Bible when they are preparing for sermons; 80 percent believe pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families, and 70 percent say they don’t have a close friend.

If these statistics were about nurses, doctors, military personnel, or basically any other profession, people would want to find ways to help. But with pastors, people tend to think that if you have problems it is because you just aren’t spiritual enough.

And that could be true, but your problems as a carpenter, an IT person, or a business owner might be a spiritual problem as well. I am not saying this to get into a debate on which jobs require the most holy living. I am saying it to make it clear that being a pastor is hard work and it takes it’s toll like any other profession or job.

This is why the Apostle Paul said…

7 What soldier has to pay his own expenses? What farmer plants a vineyard and doesn’t have the right to eat some of its fruit? What shepherd cares for a flock of sheep and isn’t allowed to drink some of the milk? 8 Am I expressing merely a human opinion, or does the law say the same thing? 9 For the law of Moses says, “You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.” Was God thinking only about oxen when he said this? 10 Wasn’t he actually speaking to us? Yes, it was written for us, so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest.

11 Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren’t we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink? 12 If you support others who preach to you, shouldn’t we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:7-12 NLT

This chapter is more of an indictment on the attitude of the Corinthians than it is some type of command for ministers to be volunteer only.

To Timothy Paul wrote:

17 Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well,[e] especially those who work hard at both preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, “You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.” And in another place, “Those who work deserve their pay!”

1 Timothy 5:17-18 NLT

The Corinthians, who were a wealthy church, weren’t paying Paul, so instead he was working a side job (tent maker), as well as, collecting money from other faithful churches.

In 2nd Corinthians he writes:

5 But I don’t consider myself inferior in any way to these “super apostles” who teach such things. 6 I may be unskilled as a speaker, but I’m not lacking in knowledge. We have made this clear to you in every possible way.

7 Was I wrong when I humbled myself and honored you by preaching God’s Good News to you without expecting anything in return? 8 **I “robbed” other churches by accepting their contributions so I could serve you at no cost. 9 And when I was with you and didn’t have enough to live on, I did not become a financial burden to anyone. For the brothers who came from Macedonia brought me all that I needed. I have never been a burden to you, and I never will be.** 10 As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, no one in all of Greece[b] will ever stop me from boasting about this. 11 Why? Because I don’t love you? God knows that I do.

12 But I will continue doing what I have always done. This will undercut those who are looking for an opportunity to boast that their work is just like ours. 13 These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 But I am not surprised! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve.

2 Corinthians 11:5-15 NLT

Paul was getting money from churches in the Macedonia region so that he could preach in Corinth without them paying him. And notice he didn’t want money from those who were coming to faith. As he says, to those he is preaching the gospel to. People who had already believed the gospel were the main source of his income. That way people who were just hearing about Jesus were not burdened to give. As Paul had written to the Philippian church.

15 As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. 16 Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once. 17 I don’t say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness.

Philippians 4:15-17 NLT

And the reason why seems to be that, in Corinth, there were many false apostles who were preaching for the money and Paul did not want to be lumped in with them.

Being a pastor or a missionary is not about living a life of poverty, it is about preaching the Good News because God has called you to it. And in that process there will probably be times of plenty and times of want.

The last obvious reason that Paul worked a secular job, as well as ministering to others, is because many have no idea how difficult ministry can be and they will not respect you if you are just a pastor.

I worked construction for a long time and many of you have either worked with me or seen my work as a contractor.

Most who know that side of me would have a difficult time calling me lazy. And very few here today would probably want to lay down a big wager saying that they could out work me. Paul, in working as a tent maker, was helping to build connection with those he ministered to.

This is why he goes on to say:

19 Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. 20 When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. 21 When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.

22 When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. 23 I do to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

1 Corinthians 9:19-22 NLT

When you know what others have gone through or are going through it is easier to gain their respect. Have you ever had to commute from Bonney Lake to Bellevue or Seattle for at least a year for work? If you have, then you can understand the increased stresses of terrible traffic.

Good luck getting sympathy, from someone who commutes north, if you have a half hour to work.

Paul’s aim was to find common ground and connection with everyone. Especially to those who had not yet heard about Jesus’ saving power.

Let me close by saying this. It is fine to question the motives of a pastor or a missionary. But please don’t question their need to be financially supported anymore than you believe in your need to be paid.

They have the same needs and probably similar wants to you. It is just that they have been given a calling that leads others to feel very free to judge their motives, their actions, the size of their house and even the make of their car.