

1 Corinthians 9:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Have we not power to eat and to drink?

Analysis

Have we not power to eat and to drink? Paul begins his defense by asserting apostolic exousia (ἐξουσία, "authority, right, power")—the same term used in 8:9 for the "strong's" liberty to eat idol-meat. The parallelism is intentional: just as the knowledgeable have freedom regarding food, apostles have the right to receive material support from those they serve spiritually.

"Eat and drink" is not about diet but about financial support for sustenance. Paul argues from lesser to greater: if soldiers, farmers, and shepherds receive compensation (v. 7), and if Old Testament priests lived from temple offerings (v. 13), how much more should gospel ministers be supported? Yet Paul will dramatically refuse this right (v. 12, 15-18), modeling the self-denial he urged in chapter 8. The one who insisted the "strong" limit their freedom for the "weak" now demonstrates his own willingness to surrender legitimate apostolic privileges.

Historical Context

Itinerant philosophers and religious teachers in the Greco-Roman world typically received financial support from patrons or students. Sophists charged fees; Cynics begged; Stoics accepted hospitality. Jewish rabbis, however, often practiced a trade to avoid burdening the community—a model Paul followed (Acts 18:3). His tent-making was controversial because it deviated from Greek cultural expectations for teachers.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. Why does Paul assert his right to financial support before dramatically renouncing it?
2. How does 1 Timothy 5:17-18 apply Paul's principle that gospel ministers deserve material support?
3. What is the difference between claiming a right and insisting on exercising it?

Interlinear Text

μὴ	οὐκ	ἔχομεν	ἔξουσίαν	φαγεῖν	καὶ	πιεῖν
G3361	G3756	Have we	power	to eat	and	to drink
		G2192	G1849	G5315	G2532	G4095

Additional Cross-References

1 Thessalonians 2:6 (Parallel theme): Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

Luke 10:7 (Parallel theme): And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.