

“Does God Care About Oxen?”: Another Look at Paul’s Use of Deuteronomy 25:4 in 1 Corinthians 9:9

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Introduction

First Corinthians 9:8-10 is one of the more controversial of Paul’s Old Testament (OT) citations: “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain” (Οὐ κημώσεις βοῆν ἄλοῶντα).¹ Many scholars see this quotation as OT civil law ripped from its context and applied allegorically,² spiritually, fancifully, or even mystically.³ Even more radically, some follow A. Stanley in arguing that “the lesson which is regarded as subordinate is denied altogether.”⁴ In other words, Paul is accused of not

¹ Compare Deut 25:4, which reads “Do not muzzle an ox while it is threshing” (לֹא תַחַסֵּם שׂוֹר בְּדִישׁוֹ). Translations from the original languages are the author’s own unless otherwise noted.

² For example, see R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). A. T. Hanson does argue that Paul used allegory here, but not consciously, only following other common analogical uses by the rabbis (*Studies in Paul’s Technique and Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974]). However, he seems to conflate analogy with allegory and even typology. In this paper, I use analogy as a comparison between two items for purposes of clarification, while allegory refers to the drawing out of a hidden significance beyond or in addition to the literal meaning of a text. For further discussion, see M. W. Bloomfield, “Allegory as Interpretation,” *New Literary History* 3(1971): 301–317; P. Jewett, “Concerning the Allegorical Interpretation of Scripture,” *WTJ* 17(1954): 1–20.

³ Philo and Hellenistic Judaism often referred to the supposedly higher meaning of the text. M. D. Hooker argues that Paul follows their methods (“Beyond the Things That Are Written: St Paul’s Use of Scripture,” *NTS* 27 [1981]: 295–309).

⁴ A. P. Stanley, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (4th ed.; London: John Murray, 1876), 142. See also C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper, 1968). H. Conzelmann argues that only the lofty matters are important, and all the details are to be allegorized (*1 Corinthians* [Hermeneia;

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only ignoring and misapplying the original context of the command, but also audaciously declaring that it has nothing at all to do with the literal meaning of the words.⁵

In contrast, this paper contends that Paul wholly relies on the OT context of God's care for animals to make his quotation of Deut 25:4 work in the logical flow of his argument. Thus, I will first consider the broader context within 1 Corinthians, before examining the interpretation of Deut 25:4 in its context. I will then return to 1 Corinthians 9 for a more detailed analysis of Paul's argumentation and use of the OT, in light of the context of Deut 25:4.

Broad New Testament Context

Scholars debate many issues in the book of 1 Corinthians, including Paul's motivation for writing. However, in this longest of Paul's epistles, written to the largest city in Greece at that time, the apostle is almost certainly dealing with the difficulties of authority and leadership. Because Paul stayed longer in Corinth, he was better able to warn, admonish and speak the truth forcefully to the warring parties.⁶

Openly immoral members of the Corinthian church were apparently demanding the prerogative to exercise their individual rights, in accord with the then-current philosophy.⁷ The disunity of the church thus weighed heavily on Paul's heart as he wrote 1 Corinthians. But the factions and other problems in the church also give a clearer glimpse of the struggles Paul faced in understanding how Christian freedom relates to societal tradition.⁸

A concise structure of the book is as follows. In chapters 1–6, Paul is responding to oral reports about the church: divisions, incest, lawsuits, and

Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975]).

⁵ See D. J. Moo, "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 189.

⁶ G. Bray, ed., *1–2 Corinthians* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 7; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), xvii.

⁷ C. Blomberg notes the tensions between high levels of prostitution and asceticism (*1 Corinthians* [NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 17–27).

⁸ J. Dunn, "The Pauline Letters," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (ed. J. Barton; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 282. See also R. Butarbutar, *Paul and Conflict Resolution: An Exegetical Study of Paul's Apostolic Paradigm in 1 Corinthians 9* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 2–9.

immorality (4:1–21 is about attitudes toward the apostles). In chapters 7–16, Paul addresses the issues raised in a letter from the Corinthians concerning marriage, food sacrificed to idols, worship, resurrection, and the collection for Jerusalem.⁹ Within this second section, 1 Corinthians 8–11 discusses food offered to idols. Those who wanted to eat idol food asserted that their belief in monotheism allowed them to be free from irrelevant dietary restrictions. However, some were eating meat offered to idols in order to “flaunt their freedom,” a form of gluttony.¹⁰ Paul had to address the problem this freedom posed to those whose conscience was pricked by the eating of idol food.

Within this bigger picture, many scholars consider the abrupt switch to apostolic authority in chapter 9 to be out of place within the discussion, or even part of a separate letter.¹¹ However, several recent works have shown that chapter 9 is actually key to understanding some of the main reasons Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.¹² Among those who see 1 Corinthians 9 as part of Paul’s original discourse, three main views emerge. The majority of scholars see chapter 9 as Paul’s defense against those who opposed him in Corinth. In other words, in order for his comments on idols to have any effect, he had to establish his authority over and against those who were questioning him.¹³ A second group views this supposed digression as the crucial part of a legitimate Greek epideictic argumentation, serving to strengthen what is already believed. Although the argument for profitability in regards to food and sexuality is not yet complete, chapter 9 helps to

⁹ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 29–30.

¹⁰ Bray, *1–2 Corinthians*, 2.

¹¹ For examples, see Barrett, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 219; J. Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), xxxix–xliii, 211–13.

¹² For a helpful summary of the arguments for the coherence of 1 Corinthians 8–10, see J. F. M. Smit, “About the Idol Offerings:” *Rhetoric, Social Context, and Theology of Paul’s Discourse in First Corinthians 8:1–11:1* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 27; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 8–10. Barrett suggests that v. 13 is referring to pagan practices in the temple, another connection with chapters 8 and 10 (*Epistle to the Corinthians*, 207). See also D. Newton, *Deity and Diet: The Dilemma of Sacrificial Food at Corinth* (JSNTSup 169; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 321.

¹³ See C. D. Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004); W. Orr and J. A. Walther, *1 Corinthians* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 240–41; Barrett, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 200–201; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 393, 409; C. Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1976).

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prepare the Corinthians to judge wisely regarding idolatry (1 Cor 10:14–22).¹⁴ A third group finds that the issue is not Paul’s authority or whether or not he was allowed to accept financial support as an apostle, but that Paul refused to exercise his rights in order to set an example of giving up one’s rights for the sake of another. Personal sacrifice and commitment to the unity of the church are part of imitating the “model character of the apostle and his ways in Christ.”¹⁵ The freedom of the liberal Corinthians parallels the apostle’s freedom to accept support for his labors, but love often means giving up entitlements for the sake of others.¹⁶ Although Paul accepts the arguments of those who wished to eat idol food, he asks them not to use their rights for the sake of those weak in faith. Paul recommends his apostleship as a positive example of self-renunciation.

Others note that more than one of the above views could have been operating at the same time.¹⁷ Along these lines, arguments for one of these

¹⁴ For instance, A. Eriksson finds that 1 Corinthians 8–11 is a rhetorical unit of deliberative but unobtrusive argumentation (*Traditions as Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians* [Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series 29; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998], 146, 173). See also J. Fotopoulos, who advocates that Paul is using traditional rhetorical strategy, but is also creatively and contextually shaping it for his epistolary needs (*Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1* [WUNT 2/151; Tübingen: Mohr {Siebeck}, 2003], 197–9). A. Thiselton makes a similar argument (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 44–45).

¹⁵ W. Wuellner, “Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation,” in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition*, (Festschrift for R.M. Grant; Théologie Historique 53; ed. W.R. Schoedel; Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 187. Wuellner also discusses the rhetorical sophistication of Paul’s apparent digressions in general. See also S. C. Barton, “‘All Things to All People’: Paul and the Law in Light of 1 Corinthians 9:19–23,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. J. D. G. Dunn; The Third Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 272–3; M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992); Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols*; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 607; Bray, *1–2 Corinthians*, 2.

¹⁶ Barrett, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 16–17. See also Thiselton, who provides a thorough refutation of the view that 1 Corinthians 8–11 is not a rhetorical unit (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 608).

¹⁷ Newton, *Deity and Diet*, 317; R. Phua, *Idolatry and Authority: A Study of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 in the Light of the Jewish Diaspora* (Library of New Testament Studies 299; London: T&T Clark, 2005); Butarbutar, *Paul and Conflict Resolution*, 108–110. Stanley sees two levels of rhetoric, but separates them in space and time throughout the chapter (*Arguing with Scripture*).

views that negate the other possibilities often create a false dichotomy between them. Indeed, Paul employs several rhetorical and logical strategies in 1 Corinthians 9, and appeals to both human and divine authorities.¹⁸

However, as I will argue in the more detailed analysis of 1 Corinthians 9, the third view seems most coherent and convincing in terms of Paul's flow of logic. The apostle appears to be setting himself up as an example in unselfishly giving up his rights for the sake of others and the gospel.¹⁹ One of his rhetorical strategies is to list three similar examples in the realities of everyday life (9:7), and then to appeal to three authorities for even more persuasive corroboration: the Law of Moses (9:9), the temple service (9:13), and commands from the Lord (9:14).²⁰ Thus, the Old Testament context of Paul's quotation becomes crucial for the interpretation of his reasoning in 1 Corinthians 9. If Paul here uses Deut 25:4 out of context in applying it to human workers instead of oxen, the reader would no longer be able to follow or trust his logic and argumentation. In light of this, the original context of Deut 25:4 must be considered before returning to a closer examination of 1 Corinthians 9.

¹⁸ Paul links freedom with ἐξουσία like Stoic philosophers, moving from freedom (9:1) to ἐξουσία (9:4–12) to freedom (9:19) concerning the gospel. The apostle also seems to follow the Cynics by accepting hardship in order to be an example. However, though Paul uses the vocabulary, ideas, and terminology of these philosophic traditions, he does not uncritically appropriate the borrowed symbols. For further discussion, see L. Galloway, *Freedom in the Gospel: Paul's Exemplum in 1 Cor 9 in Conversation with the Discourses of Epictetus and Philo* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 38; Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

¹⁹ While he may also be answering questions about his apostolic authority, this does not seem to be his main focus. In fact, Mitchell argues convincingly that a dual approach does not work rhetorically, because Paul could not use his example as such a strong motivation if he was also defending that very apostolic example (*Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 244). She also perceptively notes that 1 Corinthians 9 is a digression of comparison or amplification, but as the term digression has been used to imply discontinuity, it should not be used unless carefully defined.

²⁰ Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994). Most other commentators miss this connection between three human analogies and three religious examples. Butarbutar notes that the example of the soldier is particularly important because the government supported them at high cost (*Paul and Conflict Resolution*, 133). Smit characterizes the three authorities as the social rules (positive), the regulations of Moses (comparative), and the instructions of the Lord (superlative) (“*About the Idol Offerings*,” 110).

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Old Testament Context

In spite of the lack of consensus concerning the date and authorship of Deuteronomy,²¹ many scholars do find a unity in the book itself as the book of the law, a series of sermons, or a treaty documenting the covenant between God and Israel.²² However, most still see Deuteronomy 25 (and indeed Deuteronomy 12–26) as a disparate collection of laws that have little connection to each other beyond their importance to the covenant.²³ Others find that each law is related to the previous not by a common topic, but by a similar word or grammatical pattern, as if the compiler was reminded of each succeeding law in a somewhat haphazard pattern.²⁴

A few scholars have ventured to analyze the structure of the multitudinous stipulations. Christenson has proposed a very broad concentric and chiasmic structure for Deut 12–26, considering that even more broadly, Deut 21:10–25:19 contains laws concerning “human affairs in relation to others.”²⁵ C. Carmichael suggests that the arrangement of Deuteronomy reflects the order and structure of the Book of the Covenant

²¹ Scholars interpret Deuteronomy in many ways, but most argue for its origin around the time of Josiah’s reforms, in order to ensure the keeping of certain laws by the people. However, some scholars have considered other alternatives, especially as the treaty form of Israel’s covenant book seems to match most closely that of the ancient Hittite treaties. For example, see E. H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (New American Commentary 4; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 27–32; P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 20–24; E. S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in *Deuteronomy–2 Samuel* (EBC 3; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 4; V. P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 283–9.

In line with the latter view, I hold a basically synchronic view of Deuteronomy’s origins. I accept Deuteronomy’s portrayal of itself, with the bulk being actual sermons given by Moses, though likely updated by later scribes to reflect the changes in political and linguistic realities. However, this presupposition does not ultimately affect the interpretation of Deut 25:4 in this paper, as the final form of Deuteronomy is more or less what Paul had access to, whether or not it was written by Moses or resulted from a series of redactors and editors. For cogent and coherent defenses of Mosaic authorship, see Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 372–5; Kitchen, *On the Reliability*, 295–307.

²² See Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” 3; Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 20–24.

²³ Among others, see G. Von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Das Alte Testament Deutsch 8. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 12–13; J. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (NJPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), xxi–xxii.

²⁴ For discussion of this, see Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 390.

²⁵ D. L. Christenson, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12* (WBC 6B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 464.

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in Exodus 21–23.²⁶ In the Book of the Covenant, laws concerning social privileges are bookends around laws concerning the legal system and courtroom laws. Interestingly, Carmichael lists Exod 23:10–12, which also highlights a concern for animals, in the second section of social privilege laws. This pattern is paralleled, but with more complexity, in Deuteronomy 12–26, where Deut 25:4 is considered a law about privileges (interpolated among laws of the courtroom).²⁷ Christenson’s analysis also places Deut 25:4 within the laws of humanitarian concerns and social ethics (Deut 25:1–16), paralleling Deut 24:6–16 and separated by the summary law protecting the disadvantaged (24:17–22).²⁸

Others have tried to find structure in Deuteronomy 12–26 based on the Decalogue as an organizing principle, with “the individual laws thus appear[ing] as concretizations of the Decalogue.”²⁹ Braulik sees Deut 25:4 as part of the commentary on the eighth commandment, dealing generally

²⁶ C. Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974). See also Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 11–15.

²⁷ See E. Otto for another structure of Deut 12–26 (“Vom Bundesbuch zum Deuteronomium. Die deuteronomische Redaktion in Dtn 12–26,” in *Biblische Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel. Für Norbert Lohfink* [ed. G. Braulik; Freiburg: Herder, 1993], 260–78).

²⁸ Christenson, *Deuteronomy*, 615. Within Deuteronomy 25, Christenson suggests that the laws seem to be patterned after certain stories in Genesis, (e.g., Deut 25:1–3 parallels the likely flogging of Joseph as a slave). However, this leads him to contend that the literal meaning of Deut 25:4 is totally disregarded. Especially because it is such a strange law that seems out of place, Christenson connects it to the forgotten sheaf of Joseph and concludes that the law does not make sense in a literal fashion. If the ox is not muzzled, it will simply consume all the grain it is treading and any profit will be lost. Thus, a third party must be involved to help the unmuzzled ox produce seed. Christenson finds that this conclusion forms the transition to levirate marriage, where the brother of the widow’s husband must be involved to produce seed for the deceased.

Although this figurative interpretation is superficially coherent, the connections with Genesis are anything but clear, and it seems like a stretch to imagine the Israelites having all of this in mind when reading or hearing Deuteronomy. Even if they did, it could be both a transition to be taken figuratively, as well as a literal injunction to care for animals. The two propositions do not have to be mutually exclusive.

²⁹ G. Braulik, “The Sequence of Laws in Deuteronomy 12–26 and in the Decalogue,” in *A Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy* (ed. D. L. Christensen; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 334. E. Otto calls these “den Armen, sozial Schwachen und Schuldiggewordenen ihr Recht nicht verweigern” (*Das Deuteronomium: Politische Theologie und Rechtsreform in Juda und Assyrien* [BZAW 284; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999], 225). See also S. Kaufman, “The Structure of Deuteronomic Law,” *Maarav* 1(1979): 105–58.

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with matters of jurisprudence, especially regarding right actions in the face of judgment. McConnville argues that the commandment prohibiting a false witness entails fairness to all, even the dignity of animals.³⁰ As Deuteronomy presents itself as Moses' sermons or commentary on the Decalogue, this latter option seems more probable.

Thus, most commentators see Deut 25:4 within a section of surrounding laws concerning humane treatment of people, especially the poor and marginalized who are able to eat what is left in the field at the end of harvest (Deut 24:19–22). Some suggest that Deut 25:4 had already become a proverb by the time Deuteronomy was written, especially since every other verse in Deuteronomy 25 is about justice in human relationships. In this view, Deut 25:4 would function well as a proverb for justice in human working relationships.³¹

However, although Deuteronomy 25:4 is addressed to humans, not oxen, the law engenders compassion for animals in the owner. The only other place this word for muzzle (מִזְזָה) occurs is Ezek 39:11, where it is a participle, best translated “to block” or “obstruct.” This broader meaning could be paralleled in the rabbinic prohibitions regarding threshing oxen, which cover a wide variety of distractions or pain for the ox.³² The ox is working hard to thresh the grain, but if it is muzzled, it cannot eat on a regular basis, as cattle need to do. If the muzzle is removed, the ox may not work faster, and the owner will lose a bit of grain, but the animal will be much more satisfied.³³ In addition, the act of threshing is part of a temporal clause (א preposition plus infinitive construct), implying that the muzzle was never to be used during any part of the threshing process.

³⁰ J. G. McConnville, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), 367.

³¹ See R. E. Ciampa and B. S. Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 719.

³² Indeed, some rabbinic sources consider this passage to refer only to animals and their care. The Talmud suggests that Deuteronomy refers to all animals when compassion is commanded (Scripture only mentions the most common animals), and even if an animal eats food that is for the priests, muzzling would be inappropriate and cruel (e. g., *b. B. Qam.* 54).

³³ Von Rad sees this verse as exhibiting an “animal loving attitude” (*Deuteronomy*, 154). Craigie finds that it expresses “concern for the animal” (*Deuteronomy*, 313).

When considering the Hebrew word for threshing (דִּישׁ), several other OT texts shed light on Deut 25:4.³⁴ For instance, Jere 50:11 mentions the ox getting fat while threshing, perhaps because it is not muzzled. Indeed, Christenson suggests that the alternative to muzzling the ox would be to administer a whip to encourage it to work.³⁵ However, Hosea 10:11 speaks of a trained heifer that “loves to thresh” (עגלה מלמדה אהבתי לדישׁ), which seems to suggest that the whip might not have been necessary. It hardly seems possible that the ox could really eat enough grain to disadvantage the farmer, especially considering the biology of ruminants, where chewing the cud consumes large parts of the day.³⁶

Interestingly, this law is an anomaly in the ancient Near East, where laws about oxen do not mention any care for the ox itself, mostly discussing what must be done to repay the owner if the ox is lost or killed.³⁷ Thus, any analysis of Deut 25:4 must take into consideration the basis for its injunction in the animal world.

Immediate New Testament Context

R. Hays reflects the comments of many scholars on 1 Cor 9:8–10 when he states that “there is no indication that Paul has wrestled seriously with the texts from which the citations are drawn.”³⁸ However, he at least tries to justify Paul’s hermeneutic by calling it strategic and rhetorically intertextual, unlike others who find no connection between this command

³⁴ Many of the prophets use the imagery of threshing in terms of judgment, and it may then be translated “trample.” For instance, in Micah 4:13, God promises to give Israel iron horns and bronze hooves to thresh the mocking nations. However, this is not a threshing to refine the grain, but to break people into pieces. See also Isa 21:10; 2 Kgs 13:7; Amos 1:3; Hab 3:12. For more discussion, see M. D. Futato, “דִּישׁ,” in *NIDOTTE* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:932.

³⁵ Christenson, *Deuteronomy*, 602.

³⁶ Neil A. Campbell, *Biology* (4th ed.; Menlo Park, Calif.: Benjamin/Cummings, 1996), 810–11.

³⁷ See M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (2nd ed.; SBL Writings from the Ancient World Series 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

³⁸ R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 175. See also Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 138.

Hays also argues that Paul is constrained in his interpretation by theology, not by hermeneutical method or original context. Interestingly, however, he states that Paul does not use allegory, and that this apparent instance is simply a result of reading the text as a “direct word of address” (*Echoes of Scripture*, 166).

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to oxen and Paul's application to clergy.³⁹ J. Smit argues that Paul "widens the scope" of Deuteronomy 25, and uses the method of "Qumran pesharim," changing the application from the original text.⁴⁰ Thielman finds that Paul says God was "not concerned about oxen," and argues that the law is relevant for Christians only as it is reinterpreted in light of the eschatological Christ event, and superceded by Jesus' authority.⁴¹ Conzelmann even contends that Paul uses an allegorical approach like that of Philo.⁴² Thus, it is important to examine the flow of Paul's argument in the first part of 1 Corinthians 9, before attempting to mediate between these positions, and consider whether God cares for animals.

Exegetical and Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 9

After Paul's four introductory questions in v. 1 ("Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ? Are you not my work in the Lord?"), he expands on the last question in v. 2 to remind the Corinthians that even if he is not an apostle to others, he is to them. Therefore, because he is an apostle, he has a defense for his examiners. Paul first mentions some specific apostolic rights through more questions in vv. 4–6 ("Do we have no right to eat or drink? Do we have no right to take a believing wife as do the other apostles? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?").

Paul then shifts to the common-sense basic rights of all laborers with further questions in v. 7 ("Who goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and

³⁹ See Barrett, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 205. Stanley considers the possibility that Paul many have been quoting Deut 25:4 almost as a joke, not expecting the Corinthians to take it seriously (*Arguing with Scripture*, 183). J. Verbruggen lists many ways this quotation has been classified: *sensus plenior*, allegory, figurative, principalization, primary application, *qal wahomer* ("Of Muzzles and Oxen: Deuteronomy 25:4 and 1 Corinthians 9:9," *JETS* 49 [2006]: 708).

⁴⁰ J. F. M. Smit, "'You Shall Not Muzzle a Threshing Ox': Paul's Use of the Law of Moses in 1 Cor 9,8–12," *Estudios Biblicos* 2(2000): 262. However, as Smit explains, although Paul extends the application beyond the Mishnah to figurative agricultural laborers, he is still considering laborers.

⁴¹ Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 103.

⁴² Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 154–155. He also states that Deut 25:4 is for the sake of oxen, so that Paul's interpretation is completely contrary to the original meaning. Galloway also finds Paul's approach to be similar to that of Philo, but argues that Paul does not attempt allegory (*Freedom in the Gospel*, 154–5). J. G. McConville finds that Paul does interpret Deut 25:4 allegorically (*Deuteronomy*, 369).

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does not drink of the milk of the flock?”). In support of these above presuppositions, Paul appeals to the Pentateuch in v. 8 (“Do I say these things as a mere man, or does not the law also?”).⁴³ Paul quotes the Law of Moses specifically in v. 9: “Do not muzzle an ox while it threshes.”⁴⁴

Paul has already used many figures in his argument, but only the ox has previous Scriptural support. Indeed, examples and analogies are “only valid if they are understood literally in the first place.”⁴⁵ Paul could have used a less controversial example, like that of the priests, from the beginning, but perhaps he wanted to help the Corinthians understand that they had been trying to “muzzle” Paul by calling into question his authority and trying to obligate him to them and their opinions.⁴⁶ Chrysostom offers another interesting hypothesis: Paul wanted to “prove his case beyond any shadow

⁴³ The law refers to the Pentateuch. See Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 684–5.

⁴⁴ The present active participle reflects the continuous action in the Hebrew (“while it is treading out”). See Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 685.

Paul does not seem to paraphrase the LXX, as the differences are slight, confined to the word “muzzle.” The Greek κημόω in the NT means “to muzzle,” while φιμόω in the LXX means “to gag or silence anything” (Matt 22:12, 34; Mark 1:25; 4:39; Luke 4:35). There are several options for the difference between the LXX and 1 Cor 9:9. The switch to κημώσεις could be an early gloss to explain the word for a more illiterate audience, or Paul himself could simply be using the more common, popular term. Of these two, the latter seems more probable, as copyists would be more likely to switch to the more precise and uncommon word. See B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 492; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 685; A. Lindemann, *Der Erste Korintherbrief* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 9/I; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2000), 204–5.

Paul also could have had a different Greek version or LXX variant (Hanson, *Studies in Paul’s Technique*, 162). The argument for this view is that Paul cannot alter the words of Scripture and still use it as proof. It is interesting, however, that 1 Tim 5:18 follows the LXX, but the author switches the clauses around, so as to emphasize the subject of care.

Or Paul may have realized that the LXX referred more to “putting to silence” and felt that he needed to use the more specific term “muzzle,” following the MT or Aramaic, or even quoting from memory. D. Instone Brewer came to a similar conclusion, and considers κημώσεις to be the original reading (“1 Cor 9:9–11: A Literal Interpretation of ‘Do Not Muzzle the Ox,’” *NTS* 38 [1992]: 563). See also Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 720.

However, since both words are uncommon, and the two terms seem to be used interchangeably for muzzling/silencing in Greek translations, the issue can remain unresolved and not affect the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 9. For example, see Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation*, 238.

⁴⁵ Hanson, *Studies in Paul’s Technique*, 162.

⁴⁶ Phua, *Idolatry and Authority*, 187.

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of doubt. If God cares about oxen, how much more will he care about the labor of teachers?”⁴⁷ This “lesser to greater” argument is a rabbinical method (*qal wahomer*), but contrary to what many assume, Jewish exegesis should not be equated automatically with misuse of the text, or taking it out of context.⁴⁸

Paul then asks the question in verse 9, “Is it only oxen God is concerned about, or does He say it also for our sakes?” Figures of speech are used to give force, life, or intensity to an argument. Here Paul uses absolute ellipsis of connected words (e.g., “Is it [*only*] oxen God is concerned about, or does He say it also for our sakes?”).⁴⁹

The rhetorical force of μή often entails a question that is solely to elicit a resounding “NO!” (e.g., “you don’t suppose, do you?”). But here, in light of the dependence of Paul’s argument on the care for animals inherent in the Deuteronomic context, the phrase μή . . . θεῶν could be a μή question that is more hesitant, rather than inviting an emphatically negative answer.

⁴⁷ *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 21.5 (NPNF 1 12:121). See also Bray, *1–2 Corinthians*, 82.

⁴⁸ D. Cohn-Sherbok summarizes the similarities of Paul’s arguments to various rules of rabbinic interpretation (“Paul and Rabbinic Exegesis,” *SJT* 35 [1982]: 117–132). Although some sources in early Judaism may initially seem to interpret Deut 25:4 only in reference to humans, upon closer examination the literal meaning was not ignored. Instead, the law seems to be used more as an influence on the surrounding legal passages, or freely applied (through various comments) to humans in the proper contexts and analogous situations. Indeed, D. Instone Brewer finds that before 70 CE, there was little to no use of allegory in rabbinic exegesis (*Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1992]). Thus Paul is simply arguing from what is accepted to what he wants to prove.

In light of this, *peshar* also must be defined carefully. See Moo’s response to Longenecker’s definitions of *peshar* as any “‘direct’ application” of an OT text (“The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*”). Longenecker states that since the “application pointedly subordinates the literal meaning,” it must be defined as allegory (*Biblical Exegesis*, 110). However, he does hint that if the law was not written “entirely” for our sakes, it might be simply considered *qal wahomer* argumentation. See also Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 241.

Nonetheless, it seems that for most rabbis, it was sufficient cause to obey because God had ordained it, whether or not God cared for animals. The law was written for man to obey, not the oxen (Brewer, “1 Cor 9:9–11,” 556–7). See also A. Linzey and D. Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1997), 30–34.

⁴⁹ E. W. Bullinger notes that in some passages like this, “the omitted word or words are to be supplied from the nature of the subject” (*Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1968], 24).

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When considering the context of Deut 25:4 in this way, I prefer G. M. Lee's translation (he calls it a "cautious or deprecatory assertion"): "I expect God cares for oxen. Suppose, now, he says it in any case for us, too?"⁵⁰

Along the same lines, the Greek word πάντως in v. 10 can be translated many different ways, but is usually rendered here as "altogether" or "entirely." This seems to be another one of the main reasons that Paul is accused of taking Deut 25:4 out of context. If God does not care about oxen, but entirely about humans, then the literal meaning of the law becomes void. However, some recent studies have shown that in this context, πάντως is better translated "certainly," "undoubtedly,"⁵¹ or "assuredly."⁵² In this way, Paul's focus on humanity is maintained, in that humans are given the law, but humans are required by the law to care for oxen.

Thus, the foundational premise of animal care in Deuteronomy remains the basis for Paul's argument concerning pay for laborers. Paul is arguing from the minor to the major, in that "on every account a provision made for the beasts. . . must hold good, *a fortiori*, for God's proper servants."⁵³ In other words, all Scripture has an eschatological goal or purpose, and Scripture ultimately was written for those at the end of time, but this does not make other provisional interpretations irrelevant or no longer valid.⁵⁴

Paul then continues in verse 10 with a parallel-structured statement: "this was written for our sakes also, in order that:

he who plows should plow in hope; and
he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope."

⁵⁰ G. M. Lee, "Studies in Texts: I Cor 9:9-10," *Theology* 71(1968): 123. Although this is an unusual view of the force of μη, the logic and rhetoric of Paul's argumentation in 1 Corinthians 9 demand it.

⁵¹ See Moo, "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," 190.

⁵² Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, 158. A negative with πάντως means "not at all" but there is no negative here.

⁵³ G. G. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *Expositor's Greek Testament* (ed. W. R. Nicoll; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 2:848. Hays argues that δι' ἡμᾶς is not synonymous with δι' ἀνθρώπους because 1 Cor 9:11 has the same antecedent as 1 Cor 9:10 (*Echoes of Scripture*, 119). Paul seems to be referring specifically to the application to his own time, not necessarily to all mankind.

⁵⁴ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 687. See also Fee, *First Epistle*, 408; W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Current Crisis in Exegesis and the Apostolic Use of Deuteronomy 25:4 in 1 Corinthians 9:8-10," *JETS* 21(1978): 15.

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That this was written “also/certainly” for us makes even more sense now (in contrast to “altogether”), because of these further examples that Paul draws out. If Deut 25:4 was not actually written for the oxen originally, then the plower could not plow in hope, and the human who threshed could not be a partaker of the hope.⁵⁵

The phrase “it was written that” (ἐγράφη ὅτι) in verse 10 also plays an important role that many scholars do not analyze fully. Most argue that it is ὅτι-*recitativum* (in that the next clause in 1 Cor 9:10b is a new quotation), or ὅτι-*argumentativum* (in which Paul continues to give the reason why Deut 25:4 was written for him). However, Smit argues thoroughly and convincingly based on grammatical, syntactical, and pragmatic evidence that it is ὅτι-*explicativum* (Paul is explaining the quotation from the law).⁵⁶ Especially to be noted is the lack of γέγραπται (“it is written”), contra v. 9. The only other place in which ἐγράφη ὅτι occurs in Paul’s letters is Rom 4:23, where it is a link between a quotation and its further explanation.⁵⁷ The plower is also a link between the quotation and its application, and thus I agree with Smit that here in v. 10, Paul is basically rewriting Deut 25:4.

Thus, the agricultural metaphors of sowing and plowing, and the close relationship between the worker and the product of the worker’s labor are key connections between these two passages.⁵⁸ Brewer goes even farther and categorizes Paul’s statements on this passage as legal rulings, evidenced by his words, “as it is written in the law of Moses.” Extensive evidence illustrates that the ox could be substituted for any laborer in ancient customs, and Brewer even contends that Paul’s interpretation of Deut 25:4 is literal.⁵⁹ Whether man (in Paul’s day) or animal (in

⁵⁵ Some have suggested that this poetic snippet is an “apostolic halakah according to which apostolic missionaries are understood to be spiritual laborers, sowers, and reapers” (Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 721). See also Matt 9:37, 38; 10:10; Luke 10:2, 7; John 4:36–38; Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 3:6–9; 9:11; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17–18. This could help to solve the problem of verse 10b as a justification for Paul’s interpretation of Deut 25:4. Since it is poetic in nature, it could be orally transmitted.

⁵⁶ Smit, “*About the Idol Offerings*,” 99–120.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵⁸ Smit, “‘You Shall Not Muzzle a Threshing Ox,’” 250; Galloway, *Freedom in the Gospel*, 174.

⁵⁹ Brewer, “1 Corinthians 9:9–11,” 564. Rabbinic sources also note a connection or even equivalence between human and animal workers. These scholars often connect Deut 25:4 with Deut 23:24–25 (25–26 MT), in that both human and animal workers are entitled

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Deuteronomy), recompense for labor was the only morally acceptable course of action.

Indeed, in vv. 11–16, Paul continues to emphasize his rights for recompense, but then proceeds to emphasize how he has not used them. In a paraphrase and further analysis of the passage, I note parallels between rights (vv. 11-12a; 13-14) and renunciation (vv. 12b; 15-16) in Paul's application of these examples to his own situation.⁶⁰

A—*rights*: we sow spiritual things, and should be able to reap material ones; others partake of this right, we should even more (vv. 11–12a)

B—*renunciation*: however, we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ (v. 12b)

A'—*rights*: those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar; thus, those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel (vv. 13–14)

B'—*renunciation*: but I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die! No one can make my boasting void, for if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of (vv. 15–16)

The overall outline that I see in this passage connects the dots between Paul's rights, his refusal to take advantage of them for the sake of the gospel, and his subsequent service to all in the name of Christ.

to eat of their produce. The tractate *b. B. Qam.* 38 equates servants and oxen, and while the discussion in *b. B. Mezi'a* 88–90 ranges over many forbidden cruelties or discomforts for the threshing ox, it switches back and forth between ox and human laborers as if they are interchangeable. The transposition of the justice involved in Deut 25:4 assumes the rights of all agricultural laborers. For further discussion, see Brewer, "1 Cor 9:9–11," 560–3.

⁶⁰ For another outline of Paul's pragmatic arguments, see Smit, "About the Idol Offerings," 109.

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A—the law (*νόμος*) allows remuneration (vv. 8–10)

B—but Paul avoids it for the sake of the gospel (*εὐαγγελίζω* and *εὐαγγέλιον*) (vv. 11–18)

C—he becomes a servant (*δουλόω*) to all, though he is free (v. 19)

A'—Paul labors to reach all men, even those under the law (*νόμος*) (vv. 20–21)

B'—and he becomes like them as much as possible for the sake of the gospel (*εὐαγγέλιον*) (vv. 22–23)

C'—he even puts his body under subjection (*δουλαγωγέω*) so he is not disqualified in preaching (vv. 24–27)

Paul has a right to be paid, like the ox (A), for his labor to all men (A'). However, the apostle chooses not to be remunerated for the sake of the gospel (B), and attempts to fit in with others to reach them (B'), even serving them, though a free man (C), and enduring bodily discomfort for the sake of the gospel (C').

In summary, because he is an apostle, Paul has a right to be sustained by those for whom he labors, just as do the threshing ox, the vinekeeper, and the plow. But he has chosen not to take advantage of that right, in order that he may win more to Christ, present the gospel without charge, and not abuse his authority in the gospel. He would rather become a servant to all. Indeed, in his preaching “his reward *is* to render the gospel free of charge.”⁶¹ His argument depends on a continued application of the law, in order to make an even greater contrast between what he deserves as a laborer, and what he renounces for the sake of the gospel. In the end, it is not so much about care for oxen, for that is assumed in Paul's logical argument. It is instead that Paul the ox (or laborer) chooses to forego his right to be unmuzzled, in order to reach more people with the gospel.

⁶¹ Newton, *Deity and Diet*, 322. He notes that verses 13–18 repeat verses 4–12 in form and content, using more examples but with more force (rhetorical questions and authority) to show that Paul has a right to material support.

God's Care for Animals

Paul's interpretive use of the OT in this passage can best be classified as analogical. This kind of usage makes a comparison between two things for the purpose of clarification.⁶² When the OT context is understood correctly, even OT proverbs and legal codes can be applied to current situations by the New Testament church and modern believers. Biblical commands, no matter the original time period or culture to which they were addressed, usually carry a universal and timeless principle. Analogy from human life is "supported further by parallel analogies or examples from scripture."⁶³

However, Paul also uses the authority of the OT as part of his argument, so it is more than a simple argument from analogy.⁶⁴ The context for Deut 25:4 includes a concern for all laborers, so, when considering the scope of the law, Paul draws out its significance for the present situation, determining that the principle could be applied to Christian ministers with validity. Paul thus reasons from the lesser to the greater (*qal wahomer*): because God is concerned for animals, he is therefore all the more concerned for humans.⁶⁵

When consideration is given to the larger context of Deuteronomy 24 and 25, it becomes apparent that Paul does not abandon the literal meaning or take any liberties with the law, but perceives the goal of engendering a sense of moral duty and gratefulness in all.⁶⁶ The universal principles found in Deut 25:4 are that of fairness and generosity, and Paul understands that Moses was ultimately writing for humanity's sake as much as for the

⁶² Fee finds that this is an analogy because Paul was interested in the general standard it enunciates (*First Epistle*, 408).

⁶³ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 685. Newton also finds that Paul starts with the OT example of an ox, and then contextualizes it into current examples (*Deity and Diet*, 319).

⁶⁴ Moo wonders if this may be a proverbial use as well ("The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," 186–190).

⁶⁵ Indeed, in v. 11, Paul reverses *qal wahomer*, suggesting that his reasoning in vv. 8–9 was following that track already. See Brewer, "1 Cor 9:9–11," 559. Ciampa and Rosner list other supports for an argument from lesser to greater: Jewish usage, the context of Deuteronomy being concern for humans, the question "does he not surely say it for our sake?" (contra Barrett), and no denial of animal care but greater assurance for humans ("1 Corinthians," 721).

⁶⁶ Verbruggen finds this passage in Deuteronomy to focus on "justice and fair economic compensation" ("Of Muzzles and Oxen," 705). Brewer ("1 Corinthians 9:9–11," 557) sees it as man's duty to follow this law.

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animals, especially because humans are to act for the sake of the oxen.⁶⁷ Indeed, Brewer argues convincingly that the man who shows mercy has the higher benefit than the receiver of mercy,⁶⁸ even when this kindness is an inconvenience. In this way, the law is for the sake of animals (receivers of compassion) *and* humans (givers of compassion), so that Paul's application actually is more faithful to the context of Deut 25:4 than are many who accuse him of misapplying it.

In our eagerness to apply Biblical laws to our current situations, we must not forget that the applications lose their power when the original law is no longer valid. Deuteronomy 25:4 can now be viewed as a call to support Christian ministers,⁶⁹ and was not originally written for oxen to obey (as far as we know, they cannot read!), but this application by analogy does not mean that humans can forget about the compassionate treatment of God's creatures. God is not talking about animals just to show that he cares about humans. We must always keep both aspects in balance, as "the wholeness of the covenant community extends even to its livestock."⁷⁰ The

⁶⁷ See Bray, *1–2 Corinthians*, 82. Thiselton states that the surrounding laws encourage "human sensitivity and humane compassion towards the suffering or defenseless" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 686).

Philo and Josephus also seem to follow this pattern of applications to humans alone, but on the basis of the obvious association with the reality of animal treatment. Philo does state that Deut 25:4 is not on behalf of irrational creatures, but for humans who have minds and reason (*Spec. Laws* 1:26), but elsewhere discusses various laws of Moses, and shows how they engender kindness and patience in human beings, even in regards to irrational animals (*Virtues* 125-147). Thus, Philo notes that if we can treat animals right, we will more likely treat humans right as well. For further discussion of Philo's use of Deuteronomy 25:4, see Smit, "About the Idol Offerings," 111–113; Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Corinthians," 718.

Josephus paraphrases Deut 25:4, but still considers the literal sense of the reward of oxen. He believes this regulation helps to bring about the sharing of abundance by humanity, again linking humans with animals in regards to work and food (*Ant.* 4.233).

⁶⁸ Brewer, "1 Corinthians 9:9–11," 560.

⁶⁹ The main theological use of Deut 25:4 by Paul is ecclesiological, especially the support of pastors. Christian leaders have a right to be assisted in their ministries. This is especially important because the church really is an "independent community" with different governments, social groups, rituals, and rules (Smit, "About the Idol Offerings," 156). Pastors rarely get support from non-Christians, so church members may need to sacrifice to make sure their leaders can survive financially.

⁷⁰ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 369. The Scriptures are a guide for Christian conduct, and must be the foundation of our ethics. See S. C. Barton, "All Things to All People," 273.

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true meaning of leadership is a Christ-like stance towards others.⁷¹ Scripture and analogy come together to inspire us to greater service towards all of God's creatures, even when that may mean giving up what we deserve.

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⁷¹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 668. It is also important to consider Paul's solution to the conflict over idol food in order to address the disunity and factions within the church today. We must understand our rights, but willingly give them up for the sake of others who are weak or poor. See Butarbutar, *Paul and Conflict Resolution*, 214–34, for a contemporary application of Paul's example in 1 Corinthians 9.