

Worship & Word Sunday | Echo@Home  
Echo Church | Year 1 Week 4 | January 25, 2026 | Rich Saunders Jr. |  
“Anti-Entitlement” | 1 Corinthians 9:16-18 (NKJV)

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16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.

18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

### Introduction

Most of us have had this moment as parents—or we remember being this child. You ask your child to clean their room. Not because there’s a prize attached. Not because there’s a reward waiting. Simply because it needs to be done. They disappear for a while, and eventually they come back and say, “I cleaned my room.” But before you can even respond, they add, “So... can we go get ice cream?” What just happened in that moment is subtle but revealing. The child didn’t just obey—they attached expectation to obedience.

In their mind, cleaning the room wasn’t the responsibility of being part of the family; it was a transaction. I did what you asked—now you owe me something.

What’s striking is that many of us smile at that moment as parents, but spiritually, we do the same thing with God all the time. We obey, but we’re already calculating the return. We serve, but we’re waiting for the reward. We sacrifice, but we quietly expect compensation—recognition, blessing, open doors, affirmation, or visible results. And when those things don’t come, confusion sets in.

Discouragement follows. Sometimes even resentment. Because somewhere deep down, obedience stopped being surrender and started becoming a contract.

This is the posture the apostle Paul confronts in 1 Corinthians 9:16–18. Writing to a church shaped by status, reward systems, and spiritual performance, Paul refuses to let obedience be treated like leverage. He dismantles the idea that faithfulness earns entitlement and exposes how easily authority can be abused when obedience expects repayment. Paul doesn’t lower the call to obedience—he purifies it. He shows us that the gospel was never meant to be a transaction and that calling was never meant to function like a reward system.

This message, “Anti-Entitlement,” is not about doing less for God or suppressing desire for blessing. It’s about correcting our vantage point. It’s about learning to obey without negotiating, to serve without expecting ice cream, and to trust that heaven’s approval is not always loud, visible, or immediate—but it is always faithful.

Today, we’re going to confront the subtle ways entitlement disguises itself as faith and rediscover obedience that is rooted not in reward, but in surrender, alignment, and trust.

### Point 1 — “Obedience Is Not Optional, So Stop Treating It Like a Favor”

1 Corinthians 9:16

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

Paul opens this passage by dismantling the idea that obedience is something he chose for personal fulfillment. When he says, “necessity is laid upon me” (1 Corinthians 9:16), he is not speaking about passion or preference—he is describing compulsion.

The Greek idea behind this language communicates a divine constraint, an assignment that cannot be escaped. Paul is saying, “I don’t preach because I found my purpose; I preach because heaven arrested me.” This matters because it reframes obedience entirely. Obedience in the Kingdom is not an act of generosity toward God—it is a response to calling. When Paul declares, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel,” he reveals that obedience is not optional when heaven has spoken.

Historically, this was countercultural in Corinth. Public teachers and philosophers often chose their platforms, built their followings, and capitalized on their influence. Paul rejects that model. He does not preach because it benefits him; he preaches because he has been entrusted. This corrects a modern mindset that treats obedience as something we offer to God when it fits our season, capacity, or emotional readiness. Scripture consistently reminds us that obedience is not exceptional—it is expected.

Jesus Himself said that servants are not praised for doing what they were commanded to do (Luke 17:10). When obedience is viewed as a favor, entitlement quietly takes root. But when obedience is understood as responsibility, humility grows, and faith matures. The real question becomes not “Do I feel called?” but “Has God spoken?”

Luke 17:10 — “We are unprofitable servants...”

Jeremiah 20:9 — “His word was in my heart like a burning fire...”

Modern faith often treats obedience as:  
optional if inconvenient  
negotiable if uncomfortable  
conditional if unrewarded

*But obedience that requires applause is no longer obedience—it's performance.*

Ask yourself:

Would I still obey if no one noticed?  
Would I still serve if it didn't advance me?  
Would I still follow if it cost me comfort?

Point 2—“When Reward Is the Reminder, Entitlement Has Replaced Faith”

1 Corinthians 9:18

18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

Paul then asks a startling question: “What is my reward then?”—and his answer is nothing like what the culture would expect. His reward is not compensation, affirmation, or visible success; his reward is the privilege of preaching the gospel without charge (1 Corinthians 9:18). Paul is not anti-reward—he is anti-transaction.

He refuses to let reward become the reason for obedience. In the Roman world, payment validated legitimacy and patrons controlled influence. To accept financial reward would have tied Paul’s authority to human approval rather than divine assignment. So he chooses restraint, not because provision is wrong, but because leverage is dangerous.

This directly confronts a modern faith posture that expects visible return as proof of obedience. We often assume that if God approved it, it should work; if heaven spoke, it should produce; if we obeyed, something should show up. But Scripture repeatedly disrupts this thinking.

Habakkuk declares faith even when nothing blossoms. Hebrews honors those who obeyed and never saw fulfillment in their lifetime. Jesus Himself said His nourishment was obedience, not outcome (John 4:34). When reward becomes the reminder that keeps us obedient, faith has shifted into transaction. True faith does not require evidence to continue—it requires alignment.

Obedience that must be constantly validated is no longer trust; it is spiritual performance dressed in devotion.

Paul refuses payment to protect the purity of the message.

Additional Scriptures

Habakkuk 3:17–18 — obedience without evidence

Hebrews 11:35–38 — faithfulness without fulfillment

John 4:34 — obedience as nourishment

We often say:

“God told me” — then wait for proof

“He opened the door” — because it worked out

“It must be God” — because it benefited me

*When reward becomes the confirmation, faith becomes transactional.*

Stop asking:

“What will this produce for me?”

Start asking:

“Is this what heaven asked of me?”

Point 3 — “Authority Becomes Dangerous When It Feels Deserved”

1 Corinthians 9:18

18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

Paul ends this thought with a sobering warning: “that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.” This reveals that Paul understands something many miss—authority itself is not the danger; entitlement attached to authority is. Paul has legitimate authority as an apostle, yet he voluntarily limits himself so that authority never turns into control, manipulation, or self-promotion.

In Corinth, spiritual leaders often leveraged influence for status and income, shaping messages to please patrons. Paul refuses that entire system. He knows the gospel cannot remain pure if authority is used to extract rather than serve.

This speaks powerfully to our time, where influence is often confused with approval and access is mistaken for endorsement. Authority in the Kingdom is not proven by what you can demand, but by what you are willing to lay down. Jesus warned that public approval can cancel heavenly reward (Matthew 6:1–2), and Paul himself declared that pleasing people disqualifies true servanthood (Galatians 1:10).

When authority feels deserved, correction feels offensive and humility feels unnecessary. But Paul shows us a better way—authority guarded by restraint, leadership anchored in sacrifice, and power submitted to love. In the Kingdom, maturity is not measured by how much authority you carry, but by how carefully you steward it.

Paul refuses to let authority drift into control.

Additional Scriptures

Matthew 6:1–2 — public approval cancels heavenly reward

Galatians 1:10 — pleasing people vs serving Christ

2 Corinthians 4:5 — “We do not preach ourselves...”

*Today's danger isn't lack of authority—it's entitled authority:  
demanding loyalty  
confusing calling with ownership  
assuming access means approval*

Paul proves maturity by what he lays down, not what he claims.

“The moment obedience needs proof, faith has already shifted into entitlement.”

### Conclusion

Paul leaves us with a vision of obedience that is deeply freeing and deeply challenging. He shows us that the gospel loses nothing when we lay down our rights—and gains clarity when we do. Obedience was never meant to be a bargaining chip, and calling was never meant to function like a contract.

The moment obedience requires proof, faith has already been compromised. Paul’s life testifies that heaven’s approval does not always announce itself with visible reward, but it is always present in faithful alignment.

This message calls us to examine the quiet places of our hearts where entitlement may have taken root—where we expected something because we were faithful, where disappointment followed obedience, or where we subtly reshaped the story to sound like heaven endorsed what we did. The gospel invites us into something purer. Obedience that doesn’t need applause.

Faith that doesn’t need evidence to continue. Authority that doesn’t demand recognition to remain secure. Jesus reminds us that the reward is not always immediate, but it is always with Him. And when we finally release entitlement, we discover that obedience itself becomes joy, peace, and nourishment.

*The reward was never the outcome—it was always the alignment.*