

Sermon: Why Should a Person Preach?

Text: **I Corinthians 9:1-27 ESV**

Gary L. Wackler

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Introduction: At the beginning of this chapter, Paul is trying to validate his apostleship. And even though **chapter 9** may not appear to be about the issues of **chapter 8**, it really is. Paul is still teaching about freedom to do, or not do, certain activities based on what is best for others.

Little Kittel, p. 226, [H. Schlier, II, 487-502] - “In Christ we are made free from sin and death. “How do we bring this freedom to expression? The answer is love, i.e., not in isolation but in a life with others. We find freedom in service, in yielding our lives to the divinely demanded righteousness of love of God and neighbor (**Rom. 6:18ff.**). Freedom comes to expression in righteous acts of many different kinds (**Gal. 5:22**). Being free... we renounce rights for the sake of others (**I Cor. 9:19**). We may forgo valid personal claims (**I Cor. 9:1**). We do not make of our freedom a basis of superiority (as the strong were doing in Corinth) but in genuine freedom consider the consciences of others (cf. **I Cor. 8:1ff.**).”

The way Paul looks at freedom is: “Freedom is not license to do what I want, but liberation to do what I ought.” - **a quote from Green, p. 94 in Morris, p. 129**

Because Paul came to be an apostle in an unusual way, in Scripture, many times we see:

I. Paul’s Defense of His Apostleship (vv. 1-14).

A. There are many rhetorical questions (vv. 1-2).

I Corinthians 9:1-2 ESV 1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

The Greek grammar actually anticipates a “yes” as an answer throughout these opening verses. All of these statements should be indisputable, but for some they are not, and so Paul must defend his relationship with the Corinthians. As Saul, now Paul, was converted to Christianity, he became qualified as an apostle by seeing the risen Christ. Here is Ananias speaking to Paul:

Acts 22:14-15 ESV 14 And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; 15 for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.

Conzelmann, p. 152 says: “since the relationship between apostle and community in Corinth is his work...if it denies his standing, then it abrogates (puts aside) its own.” If Paul is not a legitimate apostle, then some could say the church at Corinth is not legitimate either.

Illus. Even if all the right words are said, if the person performing a wedding ceremony is not credentialed, the couple may not be truly married in the eyes of the State.

And like the example in **v. 2**, The impress of a seal in clay, wax or the like, was a mark of ownership and authenticity. The very existence of the Corinthian church may be proof they are authentic.

B. The Law provides better for the Apostle (vv. 3-12a**).**

I Corinthians 9:3-7 ESV ³ This is my defense to those who would examine me. ⁴ Do we not have the right to eat and drink? ⁵ Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? ⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

Again, Paul asks rhetorical questions that assume a positive answer. Some of these questions were possibly addressing what was being said to the church by outsiders. Paul does not really want food and drink, or expenses for a wife. He is, in fact, also willing to work another job to sustain himself as he ministers to the Corinthians. He simply wants them to recognize the foolishness of the negative questions about his ministry from them. One can see from worldly examples how a soldier, vineyard worker or shepherd would expect pay. “Soldiers were hired either by the government or by a private individual raising an army. In any case, they expected to be paid. “The soldiers’ pay was probably a denarius a day, out of which they had to equip themselves, secure any simple luxuries, or bribe the centurions for remissions of duties (**BC V, 428**) - **Rienecker, p. 413**. A vineyard worker would be expected to share in the harvest of the owner. We think of a shepherd many times as this pastoral figure in Judaism, like David of the OT or even “The Lord Is My Shepherd” in **Psalms 23**. Truth is: many times, shepherds, in Paul’s time, were slaves. Yet, even they were working with the expectation of getting paid something and to be entitled to drink the goat's or sheep's milk as part of their sustenance. So Paul is reasoning if that is the case for secular workers, how about the Apostles of God.

Now, lest his opponents discard these examples as merely secular, Paul offers an argument from the Mosaic Law:” - **adapted from Dr. Ralph Wilson**

I Corinthians 9:8-12a ESV 8 Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 10 Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. 11 If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12a If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? **(lesser to greater argument)**

Here, God has made allowances for the care of oxen, but the argument again goes from lesser to greater, i.e., if God cares about farm animals (and He does), He certainly cares more about the part of His creation He pronounced “very good” and who was made in His image. Matthew in the NT shares something similar: **Matthew 6:25-26 ESV** 25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

In **verse 11**, the “if” there is the beginning of a first-class conditional sentence. It could be read: “if we have sown spiritual things among you, and we most certainly have;” or simply “since” we have sown... i.e., what is more important, material things or spiritual? “Here Paul is turning the idea of ‘sowing’ into meaning ‘the work of mission.’” - Conzelmann, p. 155

C. Paul has not utilized his rights (**vv. 12b-14**).

I Corinthians 9:12b-14 ESV 12b Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? 14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

Q. Why would Paul (and Barnabas) have more of a right to support?

A. Because Paul had brought the Corinthians to Christ; he had planted the church and taught them how to develop in their faith.

Paul did not insist on support so as not to hinder or put an obstacle in the way of the gospel being received properly by the Corinthians, i.e., he is only in it for the money. The commentator, Morris, believed there may have been a group that believed that Paul felt inferior to the other apostles who had every right to support. **Sometimes free=cheap!**

Even the Lord expected those who would take the gospel out to others to be supported. **Luke 10:1-7 ESV** 1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. 2 And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. 3 Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ 6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. 7 And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, **for the laborer deserves his wages**. Do not go from house to house.

II. Paul Declines Support (vv. 15-23).

A. Paul must preach the gospel (vv. 15-16).

I Corinthians 9:15-16 ESV 15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. 16 For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

You can hear the emotion of a pastor here! Paul is not hinting about the Corinthians starting to pay him now. He wants to keep the arrangement the same, so that no one can accuse Paul of:

improper motives
misuse of funds

II Corinthians 2:17 ESV 17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Paul is not a preacher because that's what he decided he wanted to do. It was God who decided what Paul would be for the Church. He has left everything behind as if it were refuse and garbage so he can share the gospel with the Jew first and then to the Gentiles.

It was like Peter and John, after Pentecost, who were arrested after having continued to preach and heal in Jerusalem under the eyes of the religious rulers. The religious leaders threatened them and Peter and John said: **Acts 4:20 ESV** 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

A few weeks earlier Peter and John had been scarce (hard to find) and quiet, but now they would not hide or be silenced. They had met the risen Christ and had received the H.S.

B. Paul wants a reward for preaching (vv. 17-18).

I Corinthians 9:17-18 ESV 17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

Q. What is it about Paul's relationship with the Lord that requires he preach?

A. He is a slave. Paul has free will; but to be a good slave, he can only obey.

Words like “trust” (NIV) and “stewardship” (ESV) are the idea of responsibility. “The word (οικονομια) stresses obligation, responsibility, and faithfulness of the servant to his master in carrying out the entrusted task.” - Rienecker, p. 415

Everything Paul does (including food rights, etc.) is for the sake of the gospel.

I Peter 5:2-3 ESV 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

C. Paul is a servant of all (vv. 19-23).

I Corinthians 9:19-23 ESV 19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Paul is modeling his ministry after Jesus' ministry. One cannot have an attitude of wanting to be served; we are to serve others - and in their context and understanding.

Martin Luther once said: “A Christian is an utterly free man, lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is an utterly dutiful man, servant of all, subject to all,” and this is all because of Christ. Position is important, but not in the way you might think, Jesus said. **Mark 10:43-45 ESV** 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant (διδακκος), 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave (δουλος) of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Paul's ministry was flexible in its methods. He adapted to people and situations so as to share the gospel and provide a way to be saved. "He asked Jews not so much to give up the practice of the Law as their confidence in it (**Phil. 3:3ff**). Their trust must be in Christ." - Morris, p. 136

Hope is found outside ourselves, as is salvation. We cannot save ourselves through our works, but only by accepting what Jesus did at the cross. Paul is not a lawless individual, making up his own law as he goes. Paul tells us that Christ has his own system, not of law, but grace. This "law of Christ" has to do with service and self-sacrificing love. **Galatians 6:2 ESV** 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

When a person accepts Christ as his/her Savior, we all rejoice and share in that reward, for that person was lost and is found, was dead and is alive again. Someone else has joined the family of God as both slave and brother or sister.

III. Christians Are Required to Race (**vv. 24-27**).

A. Run to win (**v. 24**).

I Corinthians 9:24 ESV 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

I have always had this to say about games: "If you aren't going to play to win, why bother?" This is no game of monopoly where when the game is over all the pieces go back in the box...and then you start over. Life is no game. With all the fun, joy, and attractions out there, there are some wrong roads and blind alleys, and grief and loss. Make use of your life and time and serve Jesus with all you have. Think about others!

B. Practice self-control (**v. 25**).

I Corinthians 9:25 ESV 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

Isn't the unfading prize of eternal life more valuable and worth our effort, than a 1956 tarnished trophy for boce ball. It is the difference between memories and living life that is eternal with God, but our TODAY requires self-discipline and all our effort to have a TOMORROW worth anything.

C. Practice discipline (**vv. 26-27**).

I Corinthians 9:26-27 ESV 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control,[b] lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Footnotes: [b] 1 Corinthians 9:27 Greek I pummel my body and make it a slave

(Dr. Ralph Wilson) Paul isn't talking here about self-flagellation as an ascetic practice. The word translated **“discipline”** **ESV**, "beat" (NIV), "punish" (NRSV), "keep under" (KJV), literally means, "strike under the eye, give a black eye to," used figuratively here to mean, "to put under strict discipline...."

In other words, Paul doesn't spare himself or coddle himself. He compares himself to an unrelenting athletic competitor who continues his intense 10-month training period so that he won't be disqualified when it comes time to compete in Olympic-styled games. He isn't easy on himself. He isn't casual about his spiritual life.

What would it mean to run aimlessly? It would mean to not have a purpose in life. And Paul says if you are just shadow-boxing, you are not competing for the prize of winning the match. You are not even in the ring. In fact, The term translated "disqualified" is the adjective **αδοκιμος**, that originally meant, "not standing the test," then "unqualified, worthless, base." I think that the NIV over-translates the word by adding "for the prize." Technically, those who don't undergo rigorous discipline prior to the games are disqualified from even competing, because they did not take the preparation and challenge seriously.

Conclusion: Don't be disqualified! If you don't train, you can't compete, and therefore, you can't win.

Q. Once upon a time, I wanted to be a lawyer, and then a voice major, but God changed my mind. So why should a person preach? **A.** If he has been called by the Lord, and you cannot see yourself doing anything else but sharing the gospel and training others to do the same. You do not have to preach like I do, but you must share the word with others, and witness to what God has done for you, and what He could do for them if you are saved.

John Ortberg insists we need to collect the right trophies (*When the Game Is Over It All Goes Back in the Box*, pp. 225-227) The purpose of life is to make God smile. "May the LORD smile on you." C.S. Lewis said, "To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son--it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is."

Etty Hillesum was a lovely, brilliant, young Dutch Jewish girl living in Amsterdam in the late 1930s. Her burning ambition was to be recognized as a great writer. She was eventually incarcerated by the Nazis. Although she could have gained freedom and recognition, she chose to stay with her people so she could alleviate as much suffering as possible before her own eventual death. Her journals record a remarkable transformation of a woman whose control over her external world shrank to nothingness but whose soul became miraculously liberated from despair and pettiness.

She found herself compelled to pray, “as if my body had been meant and made for the act of kneeling.” She found herself so enveloped by God, so “invincible in the profound cheer and tender providence” of her faith, that she helped her fellow prisoners with a boldness that stunned them all. “There are moments,” she said, “when I feel like a little bird, tucked away in a great protective hand.” She wrote these words in a concentration camp.

Etty’s ambition changed. Now, it was to be the thinking heart of the barracks, to bear witness that goodness and beauty existed even in the hell of the camps. Because the soul is infinite with God, she came to truly believe “nothing can happen to me...Sometimes when I stand in some corner of the camp, my feet planted on Your earth, my eyes raised toward your heaven, tears run down my face, tears of deep emotion and gratitude.”

It was if the more Etty’s outer person was enchained and humiliated, the more her inner self was liberated and made beautiful. She found that “by excluding death from our life we cannot live a full life, and by admitting death into our life we enlarge and enrich it.”

Etty spent her last days giving hope and care, “with a kind word for everyone she met on the way.” Her final words were written on a postcard and thrown off Wagon No. 12, the railroad car she rode to what she knew would be her death in Auschwitz. “We left camp singing,” she wrote. The Nazis took control of her possessions, her mobility, her work, her family, her body, and finally her life, yet she believed that they did not truly take anything at all.

The trophy that matters is not on our shelves or resumes. It is the soul that we become. That is the crown that we will one day cast before God.

But only if we are in the game called life “in Christ”!