

“The Joy of Sharing Christ”

1 Corinthians 9:15-27

We are all too familiar with TV preachers using their ministry as a personal platform to get people to give money because ‘God is telling you to do this’. They say they are there to spread the gospel of Jesus, but their motives are questionable, and the message is usually watered down. But if we think this is new, it is not. The apostle Paul had them in his day, too.

We have seen in the background of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, that Corinth and Athens were the centers for philosophers and public speakers touting their message to entertain the crowds and they would receive money for their message. There were charlatans back then too. Here in Ch. 9 Paul continues to show the Corinthian believers how to give up your right or preference about eating meat sacrificed to idols so that brother in the faith, who does not feel he can eat that meat, is not offended so he can mature and grow.

Paul chose to give up his right to be paid as an example of this very principle. Give up your right to your freedom if it’s going to hinder someone’s spiritual growth or coming to faith in Christ. So Paul looked after his own needs through his tent-making trade. In v. 18 when Paul says,

¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

The Greek word he uses for ‘free of charge’ [adaptanos] comes from the word dapane, which means to devour in the context of charging people. Paul said I didn’t devour/rip you off in preaching the gospel like some were doing in his day. Paul understood the culture that the church was surrounded by, that he deliberately chose to share the gospel ‘free of charge’ in case it might hinder someone from listening to the message of salvation in Jesus.

Because Paul’s heart desire was to “win as many possible” (v.19). Just as we saw the broader application last week for the need to honour and thank everyone who ministers to us, the broader application for us here is how committed are we in sharing the message of the gospel? What rights or personal preferences are we willing to give up in order that ‘we might win some’? How can Paul us in our day to see people come to know Jesus and be saved?

Paul’s passion was to see people saved and walking with the Lord. That is the basic desire we should all have; to help each other grow in the Lord and see ore people saved. So why did Paul do this? Why did he commit his life to sharing the gospel and teaching the implications of the gospel into our lives? He did it for the joy of God, and so should we.

Share Christ in Order to Experience God’s Joy **(9:15-18)**

¹⁵ But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. ¹⁶ Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

Paul preached the gospel voluntarily and that was his boast. The Corinthians were a very boastful culture. They boasted in their accomplishments and oratorical skills. But Paul says I boast about doing this without pay. But, to do that meant Paul had to work mending and making tents – manual labour. Remember the verse we read last week from Acts 17 when Paul was just a few miles away in Athens [a place he didn't or was unable to plant a church] we read in 17:21

²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

The Greek culture looked down on manual labour. Paul did slave labour. So he was boasting in lowering himself. But he did for the reward of preaching the gospel. What's the reward? The joy of God. Knowing you're obeying God. The gospel means 'good news'. It's the best news people can have. That Jesus Christ died for your sins. You don't have to earn your way to God through good deeds, church attendance, giving, or keeping traditions. We can't pay for our own sins, only a perfect sacrifice could. Jesus was that sacrifice for us and then He rose from the dead proving we too can have eternal life if we confess we're a sinner, believe Jesus died for us, and place our faith in the real king of the world. When we do that, we receive the Holy Spirit who fills us with God's joy. And when we share that with others we experience God's joy for doing His will.

Jesus said in John 15:10

¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

When we hear good news, we want to tell others. We experience joy when we tell others something good. Even if we share the gospel and its not received well, we still experience God's inner joy because we know we just shared the best news ever. We just pray the people who heard it would be open to listening to God's message of salvation. This was why Paul boasted that this was reward enough.

If you've shared the gospel you know what I'm talking about. If it's not something you've done much of, can I encourage you to try? Pray for opportunities to come. Pray for your lost colleagues, family members, teammates and friends. Lord, I have the best news ever. Please help me to share your joy with others. If angels rejoice when one lost sinner gets saved (Luke 15:10), I imagine they are only rejoicing because God is rejoicing.

If we're going to share the gospel we have to share Paul's burden and desire. That will mean

Be Willing to Make Sacrifices for the Gospel **(9:19-23)**

¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Paul was a brilliant and practical Christian. He also grasped the servant mentality of Jesus if he was to win people to Christ. He mentions he was free. Probably means numerous things. He was not a slave but born a Roman citizen. Yet he did use that to lord it over others. He served people. He made himself a slave because that's what Jesus did. Jesus humbled Himself, by identifying with people, showing compassion and serving them so that he might win some.

Paul freed himself from being paid. It was his right but he chose to work in case that hindered someone from accepting Christ. He modelled for all of us that if we're to win as many as possible

To give up our freedoms for the lost (vv.19-21)

What freedoms? Many we don't think about. In Canada we have the freedom to spend our money on what we want and yet, we may make sacrifices to help others be reached for Christ. We have the freedom and social expectation to raise our own families but we might give up that freedom and adopt a child or use our home to entertain kid's from other families or unchurched kids. We have the freedom to be retired yet we might use that freedom to go on short term missions' trips like Rick and Ena Ward or Tom and Cheryl Martin. We have the freedom to use our time to pursue our own interests but we may sacrifice much of that time to invest in evangelism.

Paul gives cultural examples. He was a Jew who knew he had been freed from keeping the laws. Even though he no longer had to keep the Feasts, he would choose to celebrate Passover or Tabernacles with non-believing Jews in order to show them how Jesus fulfils those. Many Jewish ministries use the Holy Days of Israel for evangelistic purposes.

In Acts 16, Paul had Timothy circumcised since his father was Jewish, Timothy would be more received by Jews with whom he could share the gospel.

In Gal. 2 Paul set aside his Jewishness in order to eat meals with Gentiles. When someone passed him the ketchup for his fries he didn't ask 'Is this Kosher?' Because that would not have gone over well. Paul learned to set aside his preferences and biblical rights in order to save some. He became all things to all men that he might save some. A phrase which some people have misinterpreted and said Paul compromised his faith; he watered down the message just so he could get notches on his spiritual belt. No, Paul became all things to all people

But not at the expense of the truth (vv.22-23)

²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings

Paul limited his freedoms that might be a hindrance to people in hearing the gospel but he did everything 'for the sake of the gospel'. If he compromised the gospel then he would have won more people. Here he acknowledges that he prayed he might save some. And he did it so that he could share the blessings of seeing a new brother or sister in Christ.

For all the sacrifices Paul made in limiting his freedoms so that others might get saved, he knew not everyone would. I find that encouraging in my evangelism that if Paul knew many would not get saved it didn't prevent him from trying that some might get saved. Notice the repetition of that phrase:

*to win as many as possible.
to win those under the law.*

*to win the Jews.
to win those not having the law.*

to win the weak

so that by all possible means I might save some.

Paul uses the word “Win” 5 times which means to get a profit which is ironic since he purposely chose to minister to them in such a way as to not make any profit financially. Paul was thinking of a different profit. First, the people who get saved gain eternity. But Paul was thinking of a different kind of profit for himself, God’s blessing. For this he turns to a couple of sports analogies.

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize

Paul was burdened for the lost. He was willing to make sacrifices for Jesus’ gospel. He said there are eternal benefits for living with the purpose of helping people accept and learn from the gospel. How did he do this? He disciplined himself as an athlete would prepare for a race or event. The challenge for us is that we need to

Be as Disciplined about Our Faith as Much [if not more] than our Personal Goals (9:24-27)

Corinth was home to the Isthmian Games, at the time, on par with the ancient Olympic Games, held the year after the Olympics. So Paul’s audience immediately understood the metaphor and prize won at the games was a very perishable crown made of pine branches. Paul said he runs to win the prize. In other words

Focus on the ultimate goal (vv.24-25)

“Run in such a way as to get the prize”. We just watched the Olympics and now the Paralympics. Their goal is a medal, hopefully gold. So do we need to earn our salvation? No. Don’t push the analogy too far because if you do only one person gets saved. The people who are to ‘run in such a way’ are already saved. So what’s our focus? Finishing well. Seeing Jesus at the end. Hearing Well done good and faithful servant. Receiving whatever rewards God wants to give us, which are called crowns in different New Testament passages.

The author of Hebrews tells us to have faith like all these great saints of old mentioned in Ch. 11 [forget the chapter division between 11 and 12] who were all *“commended for their faith” (11:39)* who *“are now made perfect”* and who are with Jesus. And now they cheer us on as the cloud of great witnesses and live by faith by fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of God.

Live by faith by focusing on Jesus the same joy set before Him is waiting for us. God. Sinlessness. Eternal fellowship, Jesus’ words of commendation. Paul said, look at the discipline that goes into winning an athletic event just to get a crown made of pine branches. Do you discipline yourself spiritually the same way you do physically?

Make good spiritual decisions daily (vv.26-27)

Physical health is important. Exercise is important but is it more important than Jesus' well done? We discipline ourselves for many personal goals. Maybe you're working hard to save money for something – the future, a house, a better vehicle, education ... Do you put the same effort into your faith? Do you make sure you talk to God every day in prayer, listen to what he says in His word, look for ways to serve others, and share the gospel?

Maybe you're very disciplined at what you eat, drink and exercise because your goal is to look your best. For whom? Nothing wrong with looking your best and staying healthy. But does your spiritual life get the same investment? We have goals in our profession, nothing wrong with that. But do we forget about the lost people we work beside who will spend eternity in hell on our way to achieving our personal goals? I don't think those are the things we will be commended for.

Paul says I put the effort into my faith in Jesus the way an Olympic athlete trains to win a gold medal. I don't want to come to the end of my life and hear that I was disqualified. Now, Paul is not talking about losing his salvation. He's talking about the rewards of the believer. The commendations from Jesus for having served well. That the effort didn't result in the reward he was expecting.

Paul made the spiritual choice every day to give up a right, a preference, a freedom if what he gained was an opportunity to share Christ, to help people get saved and grow in their faith. He was willing to sacrifice short term personal gain for long-term godly gain. Getting saved is not the goal. You can't run the race if you're not saved. Once saved run the race marked out for you [yours is different than mine] throwing off everything that hinders us [good yet selfishly distracting things] and throw off the sin that so easily entangles us, fixing our eyes on Jesus. So that when that day comes we can echo with Paul,

*I fought the good fight
I finished the race
I kept the faith*

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net