

## 1 CORINTHIANS 9:15-27

### INTRODUCTION

Last time we looked at Paul defending his right as an Apostle and Pastor to receive financial and other support from the church at Corinth. However in verse 15 Paul states clearly that he did not insist on his right to support, he did not take advantage of his rights. Now Paul has just given the church at Corinth an explanation why they should support Christian workers.

But in case the church thinks Paul gave those reasons so that they might now begin supporting Paul, he insists that he did not write those things so that he might now receive support even though up until now he has not accepted any support from the Corinthians. Paul has not changed his mind and this is his way of saying that.

Even though Paul was entitled to receive financial remuneration from those he ministered to, he made it his policy not to rely on the churches for support. This was his policy when he ministered in Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:9 & 2 Thessalonians 3:8). Yes Paul did receive support from the church in Thessalonica after he left them but not while he was ministering to them. We will consider Paul's reasons for his refusal to take support from the churches he ministered too even though he was entitled to do so. But before we do so we must understand that his reasons stemmed from deep convictions, which he gives us in verse 15. His conviction was that he would rather have been dead than have anyone think he preached the gospel and taught the churches for financial gain.

He was not an Apostle because he wanted financial gain. It is this conviction that enables him to confess to the Ephesian Elders that he did not covet others (Acts 20:33-35). Now we have to clear up the meaning of the word "boast." In the Greek the word "kauchema" refers to that which one glories or to the basis for glorying. It also carried the idea of rejoicing or revelling.

Because it is frequently done in pride, boasting is usually a sin but it need not be proud and sinful. Paul's boast was not intended to convey arrogance but joy. He was so glad for the spiritual privilege and commitment in which he rejoiced that he would rather die than contradict it. Paul had his priorities right; he received his joy from exercising his privilege to restrict his freedoms rather than from using them.

His boasting was far different from boasting of his accomplishments, as he immediately makes clear.

### 1. PAUL'S REASONS FOR BEING SELF SUPPORTING

Paul gives two reasons:

**a) To Receive His reward (vs.16-18)** – Paul states clearly that his reason for refusing to take financial support is so that he can be rewarded with a clear conscience (v 18). For Paul what mattered more than anything else is the fact that he preached the gospel freely without being paid and in doing so he was not hindering anyone from receiving that gospel especially anyone who thinks that he is in it for the money.

Paul could have demanded and expected support from those that he ministered to as we saw last week but for Paul he was determined not to put any barrier or hindrance between him and his hearers so that they have no excuse for not receiving the gospel. At the very least they will not be able to blame Paul for their failure to respond to the gospel.

Paul never looked for or expected monetary rewards for preaching the gospel for him the fact that he preached it freely without receiving payment and therefore giving no one an opportunity to say

that Paul was in it for the financial gain was enough. It fact far from being in it for the money Paul could not help but preach the gospel (v 16). Gospel preaching is not something that Paul got up one day and decided to do. He was called and commissioned by Christ (Acts 9:15).

Paul could not do anything else but preach the gospel if he was going to be obedient and faithful to his calling and commission. Paul cannot boast about the fact that he preaches the gospel for he is under an inner compulsion placed there by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel. He knew that the Lord's hand of discipline would come upon him if he refused to preach the gospel or rebelled against God's authority.

This is why he says "woe to me." He feared what God might do to him if he did not preach the gospel. This is one reason why Paul could clearly say that he was not in it for the money (v 17). If he chose to be a gospel preacher then he might expect and receive momentary rewards but Christ entrusted him with this awesome responsibility to preach the gospel.

What Paul is doing is simply discharging his responsibility; he is a steward of the gospel. It is not his message he did not invent it but he is responsible for discharging it. This is why for Paul, preaching the gospel freely without being paid was for him one way of showing his inner compulsion placed there by God to preach the gospel.

Now surely every Minister of the gospel who has been called and commissioned by Christ to preach the gospel does so out of compulsion. God has called them to do so and they find that they cannot help but preach the gospel. They find that their lives are miserable when for whatever reason they rebel against their calling. This is why many Ministers of the gospel put up with extreme difficulties in order to preach the gospel.

Sometimes the difficulties have to do with the country where they live. They might have to cope with extreme heat or cold and poor living conditions or persecution in order to preach the gospel to the people they are called to minister too. Sometimes they have to put up with poor health caused by the conditions where they live because they have an inner desire and compulsion to preach the gospel.

Sometimes Ministers of the gospel have financial difficulties because they live and Minister in a church that is small and financially struggling. But because they have a call from God and are entrusted with preaching the gospel to a locality they put up with the hardship. But what reward do such people receive. For them their reward is the fact that they preach the gospel and are prepared to put up with extreme difficulties in order that people can hear and receive the gospel unhindered.

There is another application here that applies to all churches. Just as Paul was keen to preach the gospel without charge I think churches should make sure that they preach the gospel without expecting people to pay for it. We should never give the impression that we only preach the gospel because we want people's money. This is why we give our Senior Citizen a dinner once a month and do not charge for it.

Our purpose in our Lunch and Listen is not to make money but to preach the gospel. The same is true of all our activities and that is how it ought to be. I have a policy of always refusing money from unbelieving people because I do not want anyone to think that I or our church are only interested in receiving payment for our efforts within the community. I always insist that we are not interested in money but in preaching the gospel and in seeing them receive Christ as a result.

I am getting a little concerned that more Christian organisations are getting involved in fun raising activities which give the impression that their aim as a Christian organisation is to survive financially or to progress people's standard of living rather than simply to preach the gospel.

There is great reward in the fact that we preach the gospel and do so without expecting those who hear the gospel to contribute in any way to the upkeep of the church or the Minister of the gospel who preaches it.

**b) To Win The Lost To Christ (vs. 19-27)** – Paul's second and to be honest more important reason for refusing to exercise his right to financial support is so that he is able to win the lost to Christ without hindrance. In verses 19-27 Paul explains two ways in which he sought to enhance his preaching of Christ through self-denial and through self-control.

**i) Preaching the gospel through self-denial (vs.19-23)**. The primary reason for Paul not taking full advantage of his Christian freedom was that he might win as many as possible to faith in Christ (v 19). Paul deeply believed in winning souls for Christ and was willing to do anything and to sacrifice anything to win people to Jesus Christ.

As far as his rights were concerned he was free and belonged to no man but because of his love for Christ and for all people he gladly placed limits upon his freedom for their sake. He had figuratively become a slave to everyone for he would modify his habits, his preferences his entire lifestyle if any of those things caused someone to stumble or to be offended or to be hindered from faith in the Lord Jesus.

Now again Paul is going back to the previous chapter and is talking about what we call those grey areas of life. These are areas where the Bible is silent and where many Christians disagree. Paul could exercise his Christian freedom in all matters of conscience but for Paul he was willing to set aside anything that hindered the gospel from being received.

Anything that offended or confused those he ministered too. This is why he refused to accept any payment for his ministry for that would have been a hindrance to at least some in Corinth. He loved people and desired their salvation and growth in God and was prepared to forsake whatever was necessary so that he would not be a hindrance to the gospel message being received.

What Paul did in many ways was preparing the people for receiving the gospel. His actions did not in any way enhance the gospel message, but it did enhance the reception of the gospel. Paul gives a number of illustrations to show how he was prepared to limit his Christian freedom in order to help unbelievers listen and receive the gospel.

Each one of these illustrations ends with a purpose clause, which tells us that Paul's great motivation for his actions, is that he might win people to Christ (vs.20-22).

So to the Jews he became like a Jew (v 20). Within scriptural limits Paul would be as Jewish as necessary when he was preaching and working among the Jews. Since Paul became a Christian he was no longer bound to the ceremonies, rituals and traditions of his Jewish background for he knew following them or not following those traditions did not affect his spiritual life. But if following them would open a door for preaching the gospel to his fellow Jews then he would gladly accommodate. His motive for his willingness to do so is that he might clearly win Jews to salvation in Jesus Christ.

So for Paul he would willingly refrain from certain foods and abide by certain regulations in order that he might win some who considered themselves to be under the Law of Moses. One example of this is when Paul wanted to take Timothy with him on his ministry trips he had him circumcised because of the Jews who lived in that area (Acts 16:3).

Paul knew that to be uncircumcised was unacceptable to the Jews and so in order to remove a hindrance to the reception of the gospel Paul had Timothy circumcised. Now Timothy's

circumcision was of no benefit to him or to Paul but it could be of great benefit to their ministry among the Jews and it was a small price to pay for the prospect of winning some Jews to faith in Jesus Christ.

As the Jews considered themselves to be under the Law of Moses and all the rituals and ceremonies found in the books of Moses were still binding on them Paul acted as if he too was under the Law of Moses when he worked among the Jews. He did not believe or teach that following the Law of Moses as far as the ceremonies were concerned were of any spiritual benefit to him. It could not gain him or anyone else salvation but it was a way of opening doors to work among the Jews.

On the other hand Paul was willing to live like a Gentile when he worked among them in order to win some Gentiles for Christ (v 21). To keep from being misunderstood Paul makes it clear that he is not talking about ignoring or violating God's moral law summed up in the 10 commandments. No one is outside of God's moral law every Christian is under the law of Christ (v 21).

We are under complete legal obligation to obey Christ but in everything apart from moral matters Paul sought to identify as close as possible with the Gentiles. He would eat what they ate, dressed as they did and the purpose again was that he might win some Gentiles to Christ (v 21).

His third illustration concerns the weak (v 22). The weak are those whether Jew or Gentile who did not yet grasp the full implications of the gospel (cf. 8:7-9). When Paul was among those considered to be weak Paul acted weak. That is he stooped to their level, he no doubt gave them more simple explanations of the gospel and its implications in order to help them understand. Perhaps he repeated the same truth again and again without losing patience with them and again his sole purpose is to win souls to Jesus Christ.

In summary Paul became all things to all people that by all means some might be saved (v 22). Of course Paul did not and would not compromise the gospel; he would not change God's truth to satisfy anyone or to make it more acceptable. But other than that he would do anything that did not go against God's word to make sure that there were no hindrances to people hearing understanding and receiving the gospel.

He did not go out of his way to offend anyone. If the gospel offended them well that was acceptable for the gospel is an offence to some. But if some were offended because of Paul's behaviour or practise then that was unacceptable to Paul and he was willing to restrict his freedom. Paul's motto was that he does all things for the sake of the gospel (v 23).

His whole life is driven by the gospel every practise is measured against the impact of the gospel. Everything that he does is considered against the background of the gospel and whether his actions will help or hinder the preaching and receiving of that gospel.

For Paul knew that if he removed every barrier and every hindrance that was possible then if those people came to know and love Christ then he would share in that blessing for he would have fellowship with such people (v 23).

**ii) Preaching the gospel through self-control (vs. 24.27)** – Paul is prepared to limit his Christian freedom in order that some might be won for Christ. But Christian freedom can never be limited without self-control. Our sinfulness resents and resists restrictions. It is one thing to acknowledge the principle that Paul has been talking about but it is another matter to live by it.

Paul wanted to be a winner when it came to winning people for Christ and therefore he limits his freedom in order that his goals might be realised. In order to highlight this truth Paul thinks about the Isthmian games held in Corinth and therefore familiar to his readers. In these games the

contestants had to go through a rigorous training programme for 10 months. The last month was spent in Corinth with supervised daily workouts in the gymnasium and athletic fields. The runners were always a major attraction at the games and that is the figure that Paul uses to illustrate his point. No one would train so hard for so long without intending to win, yet out of the large number of runners only one wins (v 24)?

Paul says this is like the Christian life but the big difference with the Christian life is that every Christian who is willing to pay the price of careful training can win. Christians do not compete against each other but against the obstacles, practical, physical and spiritual that would hinder us. In a sense every Christian runs his own race enabling each one of us to be a winner in the winning souls to Christ.

Paul therefore instructs all runners in the Christian life to run in such a way that we may get the prize (v 24). We win the prize of seeing souls saved by setting aside anything that might hinder the reception of the gospel. That can only be done if each one of us is prepared to live a life of self-discipline and self-control. Holding tightly to our rights as Christians or to our Christian freedoms is a sure way to lose the prize of souls.

Many of the Christians seriously limit their capacity to win souls for Christ because they refuse to forgo their rights and they fail to place limits upon their Christian freedom. Sadly in doing so they hinder and offend many that could have been won for Christ through gospel preaching and gospel living. If runners in the Isthmian games were willing to exercise such self-discipline and control then why is it that Christians who have a greater prize fail to do so?

The athletes do so to receive a crown that will not last but surely Christians should do it in order to gain a crown that will last (v 25). An athlete is willing to make many sacrifices and exercise incredible self-control in order to get that gold medal (v 25). But yet as Christians are we willing to do likewise not for some rewards in this life but to see souls saved which will be our reward and this reward lasts forever (v 25).

But the crown that lasts forever requires self-discipline and self-control. No Christian will see souls won for Christ without discipline. Life in general requires self-discipline and self-control and that is also true about our Christian life. You will achieve nothing in life without a measure of self-discipline. Likewise in the Christian life real blessings and rewards comes to those who are willing to self discipline themselves, so that they place love for others ahead of our own personal rights and preferences and our desire to see others receive the gospel ahead of our own personal desires.

What kept Paul disciplined was the fact that he had an aim a goal (v 26). His goal was to win as many people to Christ by as many means as possible. This involved real discipline. He changes metaphors and sees himself like a boxer (v 26). But he is not shadow boxing beating the air aimlessly he is fighting in a real spiritual fight. Often this fight was with himself (v 27) he kept his body in check with all its appetites.

He had to fight to do this. The word translated "beat" literally means to hit under the eye. Paul is speaking figuratively but he is saying he gives his body a black eye in order to keep it under control. His body is his slave he is not a slave to his body. Sadly that is how it is for many Christian people. Their bodies decide what they are going to eat when they are going to sleep and rise and so on.

An athlete who is serious cannot allow that to happen. He follows a strict training schedule and when his body does not want to do it he forces it to do so. So he runs when the body wants to rest, he stops eating when the body wants more. He goes to bed when he would rather stay up and gets up when he would rather lie in bed. Paul's point is that he will live a life of self-discipline with his eye firmly fixed on the goal of seeing people won to Christ through the preaching of the gospel.

Paul does not want to be disqualified from this soul-winning race because of his failure to discipline himself. Paul is again thinking of the Isthmian Games where if you did not meet the strict training requirements you would be disqualified you would not be allowed to run. My dear friends it is true that many Christians start the Christian life with great enthusiasm and devotion.

They are highly self-disciplined in their bible readings and prayer and in attendance at the means of grace. They will not let anything distract them from seeking to share the gospel with others. But they soon tire they become less disciplined and are careless about spiritual matters. Before long they are disqualified from being effective witnesses of the gospel. They are no longer willing to pay the price of soul winning.

They allow everyday concerns and personal interests to take over their life. Sometimes it is simply laziness or lack of simple discipline that disqualifies them. The simple truth is that souls for Christ are won by those who are prepared to be used no matter what the cost when the Spirit chooses to use them are you one of those people? Will you become one of them? I trust we all will.

Amen