

The unfolding of your words gives light.

The Temple of God

An Exposition of 1 Corinthians

¹⁵But I have used none of these things^a. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one^b. ¹⁶For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel^c. ¹⁷For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me^d. ¹⁸What then is my reward? That, when I

^a 9:15 **But I have used none of these things.** The word “used” is often translated with words that indicate an aid or a tool. For instance, Luke inserted it to describe the cables that were “used” to undergird a ship in danger of sinking (Acts 27:17). In this very letter Paul speaks of “those who use the world” (1 Corinthians 7:31), referring to people who take advantage of all the pleasures this world affords.

After making a convincing argument for collecting a ministry salary, Paul pointed out that a salary was a tool he chose to leave in the box.

^b 9:15 **And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.** Paul was not seeking to draw attention to himself, but he was pleased to serve without pay. This was not an apostle bullying the church into financial support. This was all about the value Paul placed on the gospel. He preferred death to having the pleasure of gospel ministry taken away.

He used the word “boast” with great irony. Paul’s took pleasure in that which brought him low.

^c 9:16 **For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.** Paul’s “boast” was being a slave. Slavery is not a vocation with a lot of upward mobility. He had no plans to stop preaching just because he received no salary.

Paul used this word for “compulsion” two other times in this letter (translated “distress” and “constraint” in 7:26 and 37). People have said that if you can be anything other than a preacher you should not be a preacher. That is partially true, but Paul was bi-vocational. He could do something other than preach to pay the bills, but God did not offer the option for him to stop preaching. Jesus informed Ananias that Paul’s call was specific:

...he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake. Acts 9:15-16

Jeremiah did not consider the task of a prophet “fun,” but he knew his call was to carry the unpopular message of judgment to Judah.

But if I say, “I will not remember Him
Or speak anymore in His name,”
Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire
Shut up in my bones;
And I am weary of holding *it* in,
And I cannot endure *it*. Jeremiah 20:9

Jonah was the messenger God chose to go to Nineveh. He experienced the “woe” of refusing his call to preach and ended up precisely where God wanted him. God always gets His way.

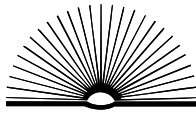
^d 9:17 **For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.** The word “voluntarily” was used in Romans 8:20 to describe how creation was not “willingly” subjected to corruption. Paul was drafted into God’s army, but his reward would be based on his “willing” attitude.

The Epistle of 1 Corinthians
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel^e.

¹⁹For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more^f.

²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law^g; ²¹to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law^h. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save someⁱ. ²³I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it^{j,k}.

A stewardship is a position of managing what is not yours. Willing managers find joy in their work. Unwilling managers still have to do the work.

^e 9:18 **What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.** We normally think of rights as those things we demand that will make us more comfortable. But the person who speaks of the right to be served by others easily forgets that it is also his right to do the serving himself. Paul has been speaking of rights and of laying some of them aside for higher purposes. Here he says he took full advantage of his right to refuse his salary.

The reward for preaching the gospel for Paul was being allowed to preach the gospel. When you measure your motives for living for others, one of the highest that stands next to love is the satisfaction that such giving brings. That is why Paul recorded Jesus' words "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

^f 9:19 **For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.** This freedom takes us back to verse one. Paul was free to serve. Paul took seriously what Jesus taught His disciples.

Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." Mark 9:35

Paul used the word "win" four times in these verses (19, 20, 21, 22). Jesus used the same word of the goal of church discipline: *winning* your brother. Paul's service was certainly focused on pleasing God, but the actual work touched and benefitted men.

^g 9:20 **To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law.** Paul took part in temple rituals when he was in Jerusalem and taught in synagogues whenever they would receive him. He did not ignore New Covenant teaching, but he set his priorities. He lived with a loftier goal than getting the Jews to change their culture.

^h 9:21 **to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.** In other words, Paul did not sin like a pagan to reach pagans. He did, however, live inside pagan culture. This may have included associations, dietary matters and clothing choices. That is why Paul's letters to Gentile churches do not promote Israel's dietary or other ceremonial laws. He had a bigger agenda.

ⁱ 9:22 **To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.** Paul already identified the "weaker brother" (chapter eight) as one whose conscience is troubled by certain matters than do not bother others at all.

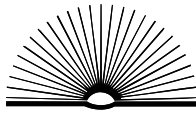
This verse has been used to justify forms of ministry far beyond the scope of the apostle's words. Becoming "all things to all men" must not in any way diminish the message of the gospel. Making that message clear is one of the primary emphases of this letter.

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While this does not teach us that the end justifies the means in ministry, it does teach that the desire to communicate the gospel should move us to go beyond our comfort zones to serve others. Jesus touched lepers and associated with sinners and outcasts because such contact communicated His primary mission. Paul walked the idol-ridden streets of Athens even though it was not comfortable because that was his calling.

Paul sacrificed to “win” people and now he speaks of his sacrifice to “save” them. He knew that some of the people of Corinth were the ones of whom Jesus spoke:

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.” Acts 18:9-10

^j 9:23 **I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.** The word “partaker” means *sharer together*. He was not trying to save himself by preaching. He wanted to fully identify with the message he preached and that message is all about the ultimate sacrifice.

^k 9:15-23 This text demonstrates the way Paul valued the preaching of the gospel. The letter was written to a local church, so it communicates how we, the church, should value the preaching of the gospel:

1. We should be the kind of people who are willing leave comfort to promote it. It is worth great self-denial.
2. We should prefer death to devaluing it. The heart of a martyr thinks that the truth of the gospel is more important than life.
3. We should see the task of communicating the gospel as our mission. Failure to deliver it is not an option.
4. We should anticipate a joyful accounting before God for this work. Hebrews 13:17 urges believers to seek to make sure the accounting for their elders is a joyful one.
5. We should recognize that speaking the truth in love is in the best interests of those who hear it. There is no one who does not need the gospel. Loving the gospel is loving to men.

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