

Use our rights to serve the gospel: 9v1-27

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[0 : 00] Chapter 9, and it's the whole of the chapter, and it begins on page 1150.

So 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, beginning at verse 1. Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?

Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?

Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes?

[1 : 07] Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the law say the same thing? For it is written in the law of Moses, Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the ploughman ploughs and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.

If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?

In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. 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.

[2 : 27] I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. 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.

If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward. If not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. 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. Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

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.

To those not having the law, I became like one not having the law. Though I am not free from God's law, but I am under Christ's law, so as to win those not having the law.

[3 : 35] To the weak I became weak, to win all the weak. I have become all things to all men, so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

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. 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. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly. I do not fight like a man beating the air.

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. Thanks very much, Chris.

Well, let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you for your word.

[4 : 51] We thank you for its truth. We thank you that it is a truth and a word that brings life, that saves and transforms.

And so we pray that as we hear your word, as we look at it together, that you would do that work amongst us and through us.

Father, help us that we would be humble before you, that we would know what it is to surrender our rights so that you are Lord over every area of our life.

Please help us then, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. We declare the rights of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be sovereign and indefeasible.

In every generation, the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty, standing on that fundamental right.

[6 : 17] The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally.

Recognize those words? So reads the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic. We should never forget the privilege it is to live in a nation where human rights are respected and cherished.

The right to liberty and security, the right to equality and dignity, to education and health. We live in a culture and a society where everybody knows their rights and rights are precious.

But if we are Christians, we are called to forego our rights to serve the gospel.

In a society where rights are everything, we are to let go of our rights. If anyone does have rights, it's the Apostle Paul.

[7 : 44] Look at verse 1. Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Remember, he's saying, I, as an apostle, God has sent me to preach the good news.

He goes on, have I not seen our Lord? Remember that on my way to Damascus, the risen Lord Jesus appeared to me and called me and commissioned me to go and preach.

Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Didn't I come to you in Corinth and stay with you for almost two years explaining and teaching and living my life among you so that you could understand who Jesus is?

I have been chosen. I have been called. I have been commissioned by God to go and proclaim the good news of Jesus.

And because of that, I have rights. That right, of course, was the right of financial support.

[8 : 57] Look at verse 3. This is my defence to those who sit in judgment on me, those who say I shouldn't have anything. Verse 4. Don't we have the right to food and drink?

Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us as do the other apostles? Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Or who plants a vineyard and can't eat of its grapes? Or who tends a flock and can't drink of its milk?

Look. Everyone who works has the right to basic support so that they can eat and drink and have somewhere to sleep. In fact, God commands it.

Look at verse 9. For it is written in the law of Moses in the Old Testament, this comes from Deuteronomy, do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

[10 : 02] Is it about oxen that God is concerned? No. No. Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? If an ox who is out working has the right, a mere animal, has the right to be looked after, fed and watered, well, don't you think that God's servant, his people, have the right to be looked after?

Verse 10. Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us. Verse 12. If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?

So we do have rights. But there is something more important than rights.

Look at the rest of verse 12. Look what he says. But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

You see, if we are Christians, our rights do not come before the gospel. Rather, the gospel always comes before our rights.

[11 : 23] You see, rights do not build or plant churches. Our rights do not save people. It is only the gospel that will save someone.

Yes, we do have rights, as he goes on to tell us again in verse 14. In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

But I have not used any of these rights. The gospel, the good news of Christ, takes priority over our rights.

So what will this look like in practice? Well, we're going to look at two big ideas. The first is this. First, we surrender our rights for the gospel. We surrender our rights for the gospel. Go back to the second part of verse 12 again.

[12:28] He says, we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything. We'd go through anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

You see, when Paul arrived in Corinth, he had the right to look for support, but he didn't use that right. Instead, he worked for a living.

In Acts 18, which records Paul's visit to Corinth, he tells us that he used his trade as a tent maker to earn a living. So when he arrived, he went about fixing tents and probably other leather items like sandals and boots and all that sort of thing.

A little workshop he would have set up. And then on the Sabbath, towards the end of the week, he would go into the synagogue to preach and persuade who Jesus was. Tent making would not get you rich.

It was a menial task, exhausting, hard work involving long hours for little pay. But he says, we will put up with anything. We'll go through any kind of life.

[13:38] The reason? To be able to offer the gospel free of charge. Have a look at verse 18.

What then is my reward? What do I get from being a tent maker, from putting myself through all this hard work so that I can preach? What's my reward?

Just this, that in preaching the gospel, I may offer it free of charge and so do not make use of my rights in preaching it.

You see, he does not want finances to be an obstacle to people hearing the good news of Jesus. In fact, he says he will literally pay for the right to preach.

He will cover all his expenses so that the gospel comes free. That's why we said when we took up a collection this morning, we say we don't have to give.

[14:43] we don't want people to pay for the gospel. That's why as a church we've taken the decision not to charge for things like the rock or Christianity Explored or Polo or Sunday School or anything else.

Why? So that it is free to people. But not only do we want to offer it free of charge, we want to live lives that actually reflect the content of this message.

We are to live the gospel, not just speak it, but live it. You see, the gospel, the good news about Jesus is God's free gift of salvation.

It's all of grace, which means it doesn't cost us anything. It's all been achieved and done by Jesus. Isn't that what we're thinking about and looking forward to as we come to Christmas?

Think about what the gospel is, what that message is, what we've been singing about this morning. Jesus is God who gave up his rights and came to serve us, who had everything but did not consider equality with God something to be grasped and held on to, but came down to be a baby born in a manger.

[16:12] The creator of the universe who spoke the world into existence, who owns everything, became a slave for you and for me and who identified with us in such a way that the perfect one who lived perfectly and was without sin came and took my sin and your sin on himself and died in my place and forgave me.

Jesus suffered what I deserve so that I may gain new and eternal life. That is the message of Christmas. Christmas. And what does it cost me and what does it cost you?

Nothing. What did I contribute to my salvation? Nothing. Jesus has done it all for me.

He took the initiative. He intervened into my life. He came down to me. So Paul is not only offering the gospel free of charge.

He wants his life to illustrate this free gospel. His very life reflects that this gospel is free.

[17:32] That it's all been paid for. It's all been done for you. Paul is willing to take up the cost that is involved. He's willing to go through a suffering hard life as a tent maker.

He will endure what he has to endure so that people can see that the good news of Jesus is free. Someone has to pay.

So Paul says I will pay with my life. Just like the Lord Jesus surrendered his rights and came down to you and to me, so Paul says I will surrender my rights so that you can see visibly an illustration

and demonstration of what the gospel is like.

Look at my life. I will pay that cost for you. So are we surrendering our rights for the gospel?

Let's give two examples or two applications of what this might look like. First it might mean surrendering my right to spend my money on things that I want.

[18 : 48] And as we surrender that right instead give that money to those who are preaching the gospel. For example the work of fees or Craig who is heading up the work in Kinsale or those who are reaching into North Korea or those that we've just had a look at from Church and Chains in Syria and Iraq.

People who are on the borderlines of persecution evangelists and pastors who are reaching into the unreached areas of the world through Asia Link.

Yes we all have rights. Yes we're going to use the Christmas season to spend my money on things that I don't need. But that right is to be surrendered so that we can use what we have to offer the gospel free of charge.

surrendering our rights. Second it may mean surrendering my right to use my time as I want and instead use that time to serve within the life of the church.

It may be being committed to helping at Polo. It might be distributing calendars as we go out on Wednesday night. It could be serving in creche or Sunday school.

[20 : 09] It could be setting up and saying I'm going to be there every Sunday. Okay, I've got my set up team but I'm going to be there and welcome people. Oh, I know all the things that we do.

It might interfere with your shopping day. It might be the night that your favourite TV programme is on. You might have a match to play. You might have friends who are inviting you out and you need to hang out with them.

Yes, we've all got rights. But that right is to be surrendered to serve the gospel. Will it be costly? Absolutely. Will it mean sacrifice? Yes. But as people see our lives, they will see the cost involved and even as we live out our life, it will illustrate the ultimate sacrifice that has been paid by Jesus. us. We will give up and put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. By surrendering our rights, the gospel is proclaimed, churches are planted, and people are saved.

[21 : 27] So we surrender our rights. the second big idea is we use our rights to serve the gospel. Look at verse 9.

We use our rights to serve the gospel. Verse 19, though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible.

we live in a culture of rights. We'll protest for our rights. I don't disagree with that. We know what our rights are and we demand it.

But for the Christian, look what it says in verse 19, we are to be a slave to everyone. In other words, we use our rights not for self, but to serve others.

Why? the end of verse 19, to win as many as possible. To use our rights to serve the gospel so that other people become Christians.

[22 : 39] And for us, this will mean two things. It means we are to be flexible as messengers. Look at verse 20.

Look at the flexibility of Paul. to the Jews, I became like a Jew. Why? To win the Jews.

To those under the law, I became like one under the law, though I myself am not under the law.

Why? So as to win those under the law. You see, if Paul was reaching Jewish people, he would follow Jewish laws and traditions.

If that meant observing the Sabbath and not doing certain things on that particular day, so that he could proclaim the gospel in the synagogue, he would do that. He became like one of them.

But on the other hand, verse 21, to those not having the law, to the Gentiles, I became like one of those not having the law. Why? So as to win those not having the law.

[23 : 48] people, so if he was reaching Gentile people, he would follow their customs and practices. And if that meant he could go and eat food sacrificed to the idols that we looked at last week, so that he could get a hearing and share the gospel with those people, well he would go and do it.

It's what we call incarnational ministry. The incarnation is God coming down as man to live in this world, to be like one of us.

Hudson Taylor got it right, didn't he? A missionary who went to China in the 1850s. When he arrived, he immediately began to dress in Chinese clothes and drew his hair into a big long pigtail.

Why? Well, he wanted to be like a Chinaman, to win as many Chinese as possible for Christ. this is what he said and this is how he lived.

He said this, China is not to be won for Christ by quiet, ease-loving men and women. The stamp of men and women we need is such as will put Jesus, China, and souls first and foremost in everything and at every time, even life itself, must be secondary.

[25 : 19] Incarnational ministry, becoming like one of them, to reach down. He used his rights to serve the gospel.

And the call for us is no different. Look at verse 22. To the weak I became weak, so as to win the weak. I have become all things to all men, so that by all possible means I might save some.

Carigoline, Cork, the nation of Ireland, is not to be won for Christ by quiet, ease-loving men and women.

What is required is men and women, people like us, who will put Jesus first, souls foremost, in everything and at every time.

Our own life must become secondary. So how flexible are we as messengers of the gospel?

[26 : 32] How incarnational are we? Do we only invite people into our homes those who are of the same social class, the same colour of skin, and kind of just fit in with the way we do things?

Do we just sit comfortably in our own little Christian culture, and talk to our nice middle-class Christian friends, and expect everybody to come in to us?

do we just organize programs and events for children so that they don't have to mix with those kind of people? If we're to see people become Christians, we need to become flexible, incarnational.

So let me encourage you that if you are invited by your neighbours to go for a Christmas drink, go along. And if you're not invited, well why don't you invite them to your house?

Yes, you might feel out of your comfort zone, yes, you mightn't have talked them very much, but how else will you get to know them? Move out of your comfort zone. If you're going to be hanging out with friends, going to the cinema, go to the gym, or going shopping, instead of inviting the usual Christian friend that you saw ten times yesterday, why not invite a friend who's not a Christian?

[28 : 04] But maybe you don't have friends who aren't Christians. Now that's a problem. We need to learn to leave the nice, warm, safe, cosy, Christian ghetto where everything is like as we want it.

What does it say at the end of verse 22? I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

It's incarnational ministry, stepping outside of our comfort. Just as Christ came down and stepped into the manger and walked the life that he did, we are called to follow.

so we're to be flexible as messengers, but yet faithful to the message. You see, we need to make sure that our flexibility is also controlled by faithfulness.

Verse 23, he says, I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I might share in its blessings. For the sake of the gospel.

[29 : 20] gospel. So while we adapt to fit in with people, we must be careful not to adapt the gospel message. In other words, we don't change the gospel to make it more acceptable by those we are seeking to reach.

Of course, we need to be contextual, we need to make it relevant, we need to say it in words that people are going to understand, but we must not change the content. Paul's approach was simple.

We looked at it in chapter 2 verse 1. This is what it says there, chapter 2, sorry, verse 2. He says, For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

You see, being with friends and being flexible and being all things to all people, that in itself is good, and it's a start, but that's not going to make anyone a Christian.

The only way somebody will become a Christian is by actually hearing the good news. They must hear about Christ and his cross. And at Christmas time we come and we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

[30 : 36] But let's not forget the reason why he was born. Jesus was born to die. he came into this world to take our sin upon himself, to rise again, to defeat death.

A Jesus who is left in the manger is no good to anyone. We must take them from the manger to the cross and to the resurrection and let them see who this Jesus is.

Jesus. So again, this Christmas, as we seek to be flexible with our friends, as we seek to fit in, as we seek to adapt and be with people, let us be faithful.

Why not give that evangelistic book? Why not give that present that will explain something of the truth of who Jesus is?

We must be faithful and we must be flexible. We all have rights, but our rights are to be used to serve the gospel.

[31 : 56] And as we surrender our rights, we gain a great and eternal reward. look at verse 25. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.

They do it to get a crown that will not last. So every gold medal that's won in the Olympics, it doesn't last forever.

They're only champions until somebody else wins the next time. but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

You see, if I think that this life is all about my rights, then I will make this life all about me. What I want, what suits me, what pleases me, and everybody else is there to serve my needs.

And I will make decisions about my comfort and my pleasure and how to make life more comfortable for me. Because we're looking for the prize now.

[33 : 10] We're looking for the glory now. We want it here. But if one day I am going to receive a crown that will last forever, an eternal crown, a kingdom where everything is right and everything is perfect, then I will gladly and joyfully surrender my rights now for the sake of the gospel and for the glory that is to come.

You see, the only thing, the only thing that we will see in eternity are those that have been saved by the gospel.

The only thing that we will see in eternity are those that have been saved by the gospel. So do not use your rights for temporary things that do not last.

Rather, let us use our rights for eternal things that will last forever. May this Christmas season be a time where we see what it is to follow the example of the one who gave his rights to serve us, that we might serve others, that they will see in our lives demonstrated the grace and the gospel of Jesus, that they too might be saved.

Let's pray., hell,