

For the sake of the Gospel

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[0:00] We continue in chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, page 1137 of your pew Bible. If you don't have your own Bible, you can grab a pew Bible and open to page 1137 and follow along there.

In chapter 9, Paul had in the first 18 verses of this chapter, he has told us of his freedom and his rights as an apostle and as a gospel worker and how he willingly, willingly forgoes those rights and privileges.

And he did all of this for the sake of the gospel, he tells us. And you might think, as some in Corinth did about Paul, you might think, well, well that just shows us that you're not free, Paul.

For all the claims that you claim to be free, that shows us you're not free. In fact, it shows us that you're kind of a doormat. That's doormat behavior, Paul. That's loser mentality, Paul. That's what some of the people in the Corinth were saying to Paul.

They might be thinking to themselves and saying to Paul, and they did. You need to be strong. And you need not to show weakness. Or you'll be taken for a fool. You need to be like this.

[1:28] I came. I saw. I conquered. I grabbed. That's winner mentality, Paul. That's what you need to be like. Or like one of the musicians of our days says, I take what's mine.

And then take some more. Now, that's what people, the world, our world, and the Corinthian world expects. Paul says, I forgo, relinquish my rights and my freedom for the sake of others.

For your sake in particular, so that you can hear the gospel. And there's a story about the late Queen Elizabeth. She was hosting a party in Buckingham Palace when one of the guests at the party mistakenly picks up the finger bowl and drinks from it.

And the whole room looks at him with horror and disdain. Now, for a second there, if you don't know what a finger bowl is, you're not, you're in good company. I didn't know either. I had to look it up. Well, a finger bowl is provided for you to rinse your hands. Just the tip of your fingers. Just to rinse it. You know how fancy, you know, royalty does.

[2:42] Rinse it. And it's to rinse off, you know, the crumbs of food and stuff like that that might be on your fingers. You rinse it in the finger bowl and then they bring dessert. So it's after the entree and they bring before the dessert.

That's what the finger bowl is for. Right? And I think maybe this person, you know, he's in the midst of royalty. He forgot, he forgot what it was and he just, he drank it. Everybody saw it and everyone looks at him.

What's wrong with you? And so, now that you understand what a finger bowl is, you can think, you can sort of visualize the faux pas, the mistake that this man had done in front of the queen, in front of all these important people.

But the queen noticed what he had done and the queen picked up her finger bowl with all the crumbs of food that's lying in it. She picked it up and drank from it as well.

A few seconds later, the whole room followed suit. Now, although the queen was free, she was free in that instance and could have let the man wallow in his embarrassment.

[3:58] Instead, she kindly eased the man's embarrassment by putting herself in solidarity with him.

The gesture would have meant nothing if it was the footman who did it. He had no privilege, the footman that is. He had no privilege, no freedom, no right in that situation.

And he would have only added to the man's shame if the footman had done it. Everyone would have been saying, look, this is why you don't do that. Even footmans now will follow your example. But it was not so.

It was the queen who did it. And in her standing in solidarity with this man, she made his blunder seem like it was nothing.

And now, you might start thinking, this doesn't apply to me. I am no apostle like Paul. I am no royalty. I have no right to wave.

[4:58] I am like the footman rather than the queen. But here is what Martin Luther says about Christians. And I think he says it when he read 1 Corinthians 9 verse 19.

He summarized 1 Corinthians 9 verse 19 and he says this. A Christian is an utterly free lord, subject to none. A Christian is an utterly dutiful man.

A servant of all, subject to all. Do you see the paradox? Paul says in verse 19, for though I am free. I am. I'm free. I have rights. I am free. In fact, I'm free from all. That's quite a statement for a man to make. I am free from all.

Let's look at that statement for a second. On what basis can Paul say he is free from all? How could someone like Paul, who was later arrested and jailed, make such a claim about being free?

[6:06] Well, it's because Paul is of course talking of his soul. He's talking of his inner man. Paul has been set free from a guilty conscience.

And he's no longer under the wrath of God. He is free. And what Paul said of himself regarding his freedom is true of every one of you here who believe in Jesus Christ.

How is it that you have come by this freedom? If indeed you do believe in Jesus Christ. How have you come by this freedom? It is through the word of God. The word of the gospel which you heard. And it produced fruit. Faith in you. Unto salvation. That's how you get free. That's how you're in a ministry.

Free from the guilty conscience. Free from the wrath of God. Luther goes on to say that a right faith in Christ.

[7:08] Christ is an incomparable treasure. Carrying with it universal salvation and preservation from all evil.

Do you know that that's your heritage? Brothers and sisters in Christ. If you're in Christ. You have an incomparable treasure. Salvation and preservation from all evil.

That is yours. You are a free lord. And lady. Subject to no one. Yet you're a dutiful man or woman. Servant of all. Subject to all. That is the Christian paradox. This Christian freedom that Paul claims as his right.

is not one that is earned. But it is given. It's given as a gift. Free gift. Of God. To all who trust in the one whom God sent.

[8:15] The God man Jesus Christ. That's how you get that freedom. And Lucifer described our high status as Christians. He said. He said this about our status as Christians.

He said. Not only are we. Who are believers in Jesus Christ. Not only are we the freest of kings. Look how he's describing a Christian. Lords. Kings. Not only are we the freest of kings.

But we are also priests. Forever. That is far better. Than being mere kings. For as priests. We are worthy to appear before God.

To pray for others. And to teach one another divine things. That's. That's your. That's who you are. That's your heritage. Kings and priests unto God. And the world might look. You know. And the world does look. The world looks around at the titans of our age.

[9:15] Who are the titans? The wealthy. The bezos and gates of the world. The powerful. The powerful. Right? And the famous. And the world looks at them.

And the world says. I think that's what freedom looks like. And the world says. Everyone says. Oh to be like such men and women. And to be free like them.

But what does the Bible say? What does it profit a man? To gain the whole world. And lose his own soul. That's what the Bible says. Fame.

Money. Or power. Cannot fill. The infinite chasm. That separates all of us. From God. And makes us slave to sin and death. No amount of fame.

Or wealth. Or popularity. Or power. Can fill that chasm. The only thing that can fill it. Is the infinite love. And atoning work. Of Jesus Christ.

[10:15] Who came into our world. Laying aside his divine glory. Taking on the weakened human flesh. And atoning for our sins upon the cross. And if you're here this morning.

And the church is. Or has been to you. A means to something else. Other than knowing and believing in Jesus. If the church to you is something else.

Other than knowing Jesus. Believing in him. Unto salvation. Then let me say to you today. And I say this humbly. But I say it with the most urgent message.

That you are not indeed free. You are not free. Not in the way that. Luther describes. Not in the way that Paul describes. In verse 19.

You are still running. The world's rat race. And that race. That road. Only leads over a cliff. Into destruction. And eternal ruin.

[11:18] But it's not too late. It's not too late. You can be rescued. Hear the word of the gospel. Turn from yourself. And turn to Jesus Christ.

In Christ. His true freedom. The kind of freedom. The world cannot give. And the world cannot take away.

Paul says. For though I am free from all. I have made myself. A servant. A slave. To everyone. That I might win more.

Paul. Although subject to no one. Makes himself a slave. To everyone. Why? Why would he do that? So that he might win. He says. Is it win glory?

Is it win fame? Or power? Is it win the respect? Win respect? Or man's praise? No. None of that. None of that matters to Paul. The only thing he's concerned about.

[12:26] Is winning souls for Christ. This is a singular passion. Gaining souls for Jesus Christ. Now. I know it's an election year.

And when you hear the words. I have become all things to all people. You might be tempted to think. Well. Paul stands very much like a politician. But that's the exact opposite of who Paul is. He made himself adaptable. And flexible. To the many different circumstances he found himself. Not for any worldly profit. Not for power.

Or man's acclaim. He did that. Because of his singular passion. To gain. Win people for Christ. Note. Each verse. From verse 19 to 22. Each verse. In this section. Verse 19 to 22. Ends with this. Stated goal. With this stated goal.

[13:27] He says. He makes himself adaptable to these differing groups. So his gospel might not be hindered. And some might hear. And be saved. Each verse.

So that I might win. I might win some. In verse 20. He says. 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 be myself under the law. That I might win those under the law.

Paul. A Jew himself. Says. I became a Jew. Why would he say that? He's already a Jew. Well it's because.

I think Paul knows. That his primary identity now. He has. Know that his primary identity. Now is one that supersedes.

[14:24] Even his ethnic identity. His ethnic affinity. The new identity. The new identity he has. Is that he is in Christ. Christian.

Belonging to Christ. That's his primary identity. And that supersedes every other identity. identity. I think we can learn a lot from Paul here. As the.

As the church of Christ. What is our primary identity? How do we describe ourselves? He knows that. And he says.

Even though I'm a Jew. 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. So I might win those under the law. He submits himself to them.

That is his Jewish. Ethnic brothers. So he might not injure. The conscience of his Jewish. Brothers. So that he might not put a barrier. To the proclamation of the gospel.

[15:21] When he's among them. And so he observes all the laws. The Jewish ritual customs. He observes it. So that he might not put. By his not observing. He doesn't want to put a barrier.

To the preaching of the gospel. You know. There's a case in the Bible. In Acts. The case of Timothy. And Titus. Regarding circumcision. In Acts 15 and 16.

This case gives us a wonderful example. Of how Paul put this. Gospel focus. Flexibility into practice. Now Timothy and Titus.

Were two of his. Spiritual children. Timothy and Titus. Were companions in ministry. To Paul. And he would later. Consecrate both of them.

As bishops in the church. So in Acts 16. Paul circumcised Timothy. Timothy. Timothy. Was a man. Who had a Jewish mother. And a Greek father.

[16:17] And in Acts 16 verse 3. Where. We meant to see. That Paul. Wanted to take him. That is Timothy. Along. On his. Missionary. Gospel.

Journey. Timothy. So. What does he do. He circumcised him. Why. Because the. Because of the Jews. Who lived in that area. Where Timothy.

Lived. In. In. Derby. Because of the Jews. Who lived in that area. For they all knew. That his father was a Greek. Church. So.

Paul did this. He circumcised Timothy. Timothy agreed. Of course. He's a grown man. So he could have. Timothy agreed. Both of them agreed to be. That Timothy should be circumcised. For one particular reason.

Not because they think circumcision saves. Or makes him a better Christian. Timothy is already believing in Jesus Christ. Christ. But he did this. So that he may not put a hindrance.

[17:14] In the way of the preaching of the gospel. He and Paul are going to be going. In that area. And. And preaching the gospel to Jews. And for Timothy to be uncircumcised.

Will be a hindrance. And so he circumcised him. In order not to put a hindrance. To the preaching of the gospel. That's his focus. Circumcision and uncircumcision.

Just like eating meat. Or not eating meat. In chapter 8. Counts for nothing. But Timothy. Being uncircumcised. Would have been a hindrance. To the gospel.

And Paul and Timothy. Could not let that. Themselves. Be an hindrance to the gospel. But then we also see. In Galatians 2. In the case of Titus. There in Galatians 2.

Paul is recounting. To the Galatian church. Another instance. In Acts 15. Just before the event of Acts 16. Another instance.

[18:12] Where Paul was in Jerusalem. He was there with Titus now. And he was there. Visiting fellow apostles. And all.

None of the fellow apostles. Demanded that Titus. Should be circumcised. But when some of the Judaizers. Came to them. These are the people.

Who insist on keeping. The laws of. The mosaic law. And saying that. If you don't do that. Then you are. An inferior Christian. They came to. To Paul. And Titus. And they demanded.

That Titus. Should be circumcised. What did Paul do? Paul refused. Well. He just circumcised Timothy. But he refused.

To circumcise Titus. Why? Because he. He would not compromise. The gospel message. Of salvation. By faith alone. To grace alone. He refused.

[19:06] To compromise. The gospel. By circumcising Titus. He would have been telling. These Judaizers. That. Well. There's works. That's needed. Extra works. That's needed. For salvation.

And Paul will never do that. So. You see. Paul's flexibility. Is governed. By his passion. For the gospel.

Both. In preserving. The principle. Of the gospel. And also. Being free to exercise. Freedom to exercise. The preaching. And the proclamation. Of the gospel. Paul's priority.

Was to guard. The gospel message. By all means. To proclaim it. Freely. In every way. He can. To as many people. As possible. He would not.

He resist. Compromising. In the gospel message. Even. He even confronted. Peter. Rebuked. Peter. That's how much. Paul.

[20:02] Was zealous. To guard. The message. Of the gospel. And yet. Paul. Will also. Is the one. Who will make. Any sacrifice. Necessary. And he will concede.

On matters. That do not affect. The gospel. Message. So that it can be. More readily. Heard. By all. Paul. Who was a Jew. By birth. Paul.

Who was a devout. Parisee. By training. Can say. In verse 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. Paul. Would rather. He would eat.

Whatever. Was laid. Before him. In a Gentile home. He did not. Insist. On any privileges. Or demand. Any special. Accommodation.

[20:58] Because of his. Jewishness. He did so. So as not to lay. An added burden. On his. Gospel message. He lived.

When he was with. The Gentiles. He lived. As a Gentile. That is. When he was. With the Gentile. Christians. Mind you. Note that. He emphasized. He made a point.

To emphasize. That he is referring. To ceremonial laws. There. When he says. I lived. As one. Outside the law. He's referring. To ceremonial laws. Not the moral law. Of God. Paul isn't saying.

Well. You know. I behave like the Gentiles. So I'm dabbling in sin. To win some for Christ. This is no. Float to convert. Kind of thing. You know. Do you know what that is. Float to convert. You know. When you're engaged. In relationships. That are. That's one example of it. Doing things that are. Expressly. Forbidden by God.

[21 : 51] And God's law. And saying that is. For the purpose of winning. That's not what Paul is doing. He did not disobey. God's moral law.

He kept the moral law. And what's more. He said even. That he considered himself. Under the law of Christ. Christ. Which is to love God. With all. Who. Which is to love God.

With all of who he is. And to love his neighbors. As himself. That's the law of Christ. He kept that. He walked. In the footstep. Of his Lord. Of his Lord. Modeling his life.

After the example. That Jesus set. For all whom he calls himself. This is Paul. To the Jews. I became like a Jew. To the Gentiles. I became like a Jinder. Verse 22.

To the weak. I became weak. That I might wean the weak. I have become all things. To all people. That by all means. I might save some. I do it all.

[22 : 49] All of it. I do for the sake. Of the gospel. That I may share with them. In its blessings. Now this flexibility. Is what. Must serve. All our gospel ministry.

This. Makes me. That Paul tells us. As I read this. I think of our. Dear brother and sister. Dean and Carrie Baldwin. Who left. Who left the familiarity. Of. Of their home.

Who left the fellowship. Of their church. Took an infant child. With them. To East Africa. To do gospel ministry. And upon getting there.

Dean and Carrie didn't say. Well. We're here now. So you all have to learn English. And you all have to adopt. Our American customs. So we can. Preach the gospel to you. No. That's not what they did.

They rather. They are. They are right now. Undergoing intensive language classes. Learning the customs. Of the Ethiopians. Their traditions.

[23 : 45] The traditions of their new country. Why? Why have they done all of this? It's for the sake. Of the gospel. I think of verse 22.

When I consider the gospel of our day. When I say the gospel of our day. The gospel of our culture. The prosperity and triumphalist gospel. The gospel that says.

Come to Jesus. And he will give you. Elf. Wealth. And a white picket fence. That's not what Paul is saying here. Here Paul says. To the weak.

I became weak. That I might win. Win the weak. For the sake of the gospel.

Are we a church. That is attentive to people in diverse situations. Whether it be culture. Or religion.

[25 : 06] Or status. Are we willing to exercise our freedom. To bring the gospel to them. Now this philosophy.

That Paul shows us here. Of self-denial. Of adaptability. For the gospel's sake. It's not only for missionaries. Who go in foreign countries. To preach the gospel.

It applies to all Christians. We're all commanded to go into the world. With the gospel. You're a missionary. Wherever you are. You're an ambassador of Christ.

Whether in Ethiopia. Or in Syracuse. And to do that work. That Christ gives us to do. Which is to proclaim his gospel.

It requires unselfishness. On our part. It requires radical hospitality. On our part. Brothers and sisters. The cross. Of the matter is this.

[26 : 04] We cannot live in a silo. As Christians. We cannot become too comfortable. Becoming all things to all people.

That by all means. We might save some. That means we must be willing. To lay down. Our temperamental preferences.

Our social preferences. We must be willing. To lay down. Our way of doing things. How often do we expect.

People to fit in with us. When they come. To our church. Or when they come. To our Christian. Circles. When in fact.

The call of Christ. Requires us. To be willing. To inconvenience ourselves. For the sake of the gospel. We as Christians.

[27 : 15] Are free from all. We're free lords. Subject to none. And yet servants to all. This Christian service.

That says we're free from all. And servants to all. Requires us. To have. A settled strategy. About how we do this. Work of gospel ministry. We must be ready.

And settled in our minds. That doing so. Will involve sacrifice. We must settle it in our minds.

Brothers and sisters in Christ.

That following God. In the way it's described here. Following after. Christ's example. Requires sacrifice. At all our parts. And that's what Paul now turns to.

As he goes. In verse 24 to 27. He makes an appeal to us. An appeal for self-discipline. For the sake of the gospel. Look there in verse 24. He says.

[28 : 13] Do you not know that in a race. All the runners run. But only one receives the prize. So you must run. That you may obtain that prize. Every athlete.

Exercises self-control. In all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath. For we have. We do so. To inherit. To receive an imperishable.

Here Paul uses an example. That the Corinthians. Will have been well familiar with. The example of athletic pursuits. In fact. Corinth was home. To the second most successful.

Athletic contest. Of the ancient world. The Isthmian games. Second. Second only to the Olympic games. Now. We ourselves.

Are not unfamiliar. With athletic pursuits. In our culture. In fact. One of the high holy days. Of sports. The Super Bowl. Will soon be upon us. And in the summer.

[29 : 15] We'll have the Olympic games as well. So imagine this. Imagine. An athlete. Imagine those Olympians. Who will compete. At the Olympic games.

Imagine. How they train. Themselves. The commitment they have. Self-control. And dedication. That they have.

Honing their bodies. To the best. Of its capability. They don't indulge. In decadent food.

Or drink. They eat vegetables. And protein. They don't indulge. In socializing. They go to bed early. So they can wake up early.

For what? Purpose. For the singular goal. Of winning a contest. And getting glory. The athlete.

[30 : 12] Stakes everything. On a contest. And he does so. Or she does so. To get the prize. A prize that will fade.

And decay. And perish. In fact. In the Corinthian times. Instead of getting gold medals. That maybe will at least last. You know. A bit. It's not real gold. By the way.

If you know. The Olympics. It's just plated with gold. It's not. You know. Some gold medallion. Or something like that. Right? But. But at least they get like a. You know. A gold something. But in the. In the Corinthian times. In the Olympic times. In the ancient world. You get a wreath. Just like a laurel on your head. That means you won. Well. What happens to those things?

They. They decay. They. They dry up. They become. You know. Chaff for the fire. They perish. But yet the athlete commits.

[31 : 12] Themselves to all of that. But for the Christian. Our discipline.

And our focus for the gospel's sake. Is to win a prize. The prize that we win. Is an imperishable one. We are called as Christians.

To exercise discipline. For the sake of the gospel. We do our running. Spiritual running. That is. To obtain an imperishable crown of glory.

Laid up for us in heaven. So run. Paul encourages us. Lay aside everything. For the sake of the gospel.

And for the internal glory. That is yours. And that is what Paul is exhorting us to do. But what does that discipline look like? You know.

[32 : 14] Certainly. We know that Paul is talking of spiritual matters. Right. Because he even said in 1st Timothy. Physical exercise profits little. Godliness profits in every way.

As it holds value for this life. And the life to come. And so Paul then can say. In verse 26 and 27. I do not run aimlessly. I do not box.

As one beating the air. But I discipline my body. I keep it under control. Lest after preaching to others. I myself should be disqualified.

This is very sobering and challenging words. It is to me as I prepared the message this week. Paul goes on to say.

He will go on in chapter 10 to say. To those who do not exercise self-discipline. He says to them. That they are in danger of falling away. So the peril is dire.

[33:11] But the reward is also high. There is no middle ground you see. There is no spectating in the Christian journey.

You must get on the field. You must fix your eyes on the prize. We must along with Paul.

Run the race that is set before us. Fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ. He is our prize. He is our great reward. And our work in Christ's church cannot be.

Look at the words Paul uses there. I do not box as one beating the air. I work in this church. Holy Trinity cannot be mere shadow boxing. That is what he means by beating the air.

What a tragic image that is. It is a picture of Christians. Who are just plain pretend. The word of God has no value for them.

[34:13] They have discarded it. The spirit of power is not among them. They have ignored him. Instead of doing battle against the forces of darkness.

Principalities and powers. Instead of advancing God's kingdom as the church of Christ. Gaining souls for Christ. A church that just does shadow boxing.

Merely does all they do. All their programs. Is merely an exercise in live action role playing. And you know what?

Satan delights in such churches. Satan delights in such churches. And God grieves over such churches. May that not be so of us here at Holy Trinity.

But if that is not to be so. We must commit ourselves. With self-discipline. To the work of the gospel. The church. Church is not just a spectator sport.

[35:17] You don't just come. Sit. And spectate. And leave. You're part of the body of Christ. An integral part of the body of Christ. You're called to sacrifice.

And give of yourselves. For what purpose? For the sake of the gospel. A Christian is Lord of all. Completely free of everything.

A Christian. Is a servant. Completely attentive. To the needs. Of all. Paul.

The apostle Paul. Was rigid. When it came to defending. The truth of the gospel. But he was flexible. When it came to. The proclamation of the gospel. But the principle.

That governed him. Was the same. It was so. That the gospel. May be protected. And be proclaimed. In truth. And in power. It was all.

[36:26] For the sake of the gospel. And the question remains for us. Brothers and sisters. The question remains for us as well. Are we willing. To abandon. Our preferences.

For the sake of the gospel. Let us pray. Have this mind. Among yourselves. Which is yours.

In Christ Jesus. Who though. He was in the form of God. Did not count equality. With God. A thing to be grasped. But emptied himself. By taking the form.

Of a servant. Being born. In the likeness of men. And being found. In human form. He humbled himself. By becoming obedient. To the point of death.

Even death. On a cross. Lord. You lay down. Your right. You lay down. Your divine privilege. You came down.

[37:25] Into our world. Of sin. And death. To rescue us. Help us. We pray. Lord. To follow. Your example.

And that of your apostle Paul. To lay down our rights. For the sake of the gospel. Help us. We pray. In Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Let us pray for the church.

And for the world. In saying. Hear our prayers. For the peace of the whole world. And for the well-being. And to the people. And the people. And the people. So. And the people. And the people.

And the people. And the people. And the people. And the people. And the people. And the people.

And the people. And the people. And the people. And the people. And the people. And the people.

And the people. And the people. And the people. And the people. And the people. And the people.

And the people. lip. lip. lip. And the people. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip. lip.