

Giving up our rights

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[0:00] Let us pray. Blessed Lord, who has caused only Scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may hear, read, learn, and inwardly digest them, that through the comfort of your Holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please be seated. If you remember the last week, we were looking at chapter 8.

We're in chapter 9 now this morning of 1 Corinthians. It's still page 1136 of your pew Bible, of your own Bible that you brought to church.

I don't know what page that is, but please open up to 1 Corinthians chapter 9. And as we dive into God's Word. Last week, Paul summed up the supremacy of love, the kind of love that builds up. He summed up the supremacy of that kind of love over knowledge. Knowledge that merely puffs up. And he sums it up in this statement at the end of chapter 8.

[1:27] Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. And Paul goes on to rebuke those in the church who stand on their rights, even when doing so would wound a fellow sibling in Christ.

And he says, as for me, that is himself, I would rather forgo my rights, I would rather forgo my rights than wound somebody, someone for whom Christ has died.

So chapter 9, as we enter chapter 9 this morning, it's a continuation of his appeal or his argument that he's having.

And it's an appeal to love one another in such a way as to voluntarily forego our rights for the sake and the well-being of other members in the body of Christ.

Paul's missionary ministry, Paul's ministry among them, is an example of him foregoing his rights out of love.

[2:47] So, it's as if Paul is saying to them, let my behavior, my behavior and actions towards you when I was among you, let that be an example for you of how you should love one another in a way that builds one another up.

And so that's what he's doing here in chapter 9. He's using his own life, which they know of, because he was the one who founded the church in Corinth. He's using it as an example for them. But before we dive further in, one dynamic that we didn't cover last week about the Corinthian church and Corinth in general that I want to bring up.

Remember that we talked about the strong. Those are the ones who think, well, there's nothing wrong with meat. It's all idols anyway. We can eat whatever it is. You know, we can eat whatever meat. Those are the strong party.

Those who are strong. And then the weak are those whose conscience are pricked by eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols. Well, there's probably one thing that separates these two groups.

[3:51] One dynamic that separates them. It's very likely that in the Corinthian church, there is a socioeconomic makeup of those who insisted that food sacrificed to idols is nothing.

The so-called strong brothers and sisters were likely well off in the church. They were the masters. They were the property owners in the church. They were the ones who would have gotten an invitation from their friends, their other wealthy friends, to attend a social soiree.

And these gatherings would have likely been in the temples. Because it's very likely that these temples have areas where you can gather and have gatherings and parties.

And so they would have gotten an invitation. And in fact, there's one of these antiquated notes of invitation in antiquity that we have today.

[4:59] I don't know if it was found in Corinth, but it was such a one. It says, it goes like this. Well, so-and-so invites you to the temple of Lord Serapis to attend the graduation of his daughter or the

wedding of his daughter.

So these would have been happening in the temple. And these well-off people would have gathered in these areas to do so. So the parties that are taking place in the temples have religious connotations to them.

Not only that the food are being sacrificed to idols, but these parties also have religious connotations. But such was the patronage currency of the Roman world.

Especially in Corinth, that accepting these kind of invitations and giving them is how you get ahead. And it's how you stay ahead in the society.

And so there's something called the patron-client model. So it's not unlike probably what we have in our days too, right?

[6:15] If you work in a particular office and your boss invites you to go golfing, right? It's not just a social gathering.

It is a social gathering. But it's also how you get to network. And so it's kind of what might be going on here. So it's not just a mere invitation. If you want to get ahead, if you want to maintain your respectability in society, you accept these kind of things.

If you don't, you start losing influence and affluence. So this patron-client model is so steeped. Corinth is so steeped in this sort of way of relationships. And more than that, the patron-client model, it sort of works like this. Let me give you an example.

Imagine that you're an artist or skilled rhetorician or you're a philosopher in a city like Corinth. You would have, naturally, wealthy patrons who support you.

[7:18] And the more patrons, the wealthier your patrons are, the more you have, the more respected you might seem to others. The more following you will get. The more respected people will see you.

And so it's natural for people who are like the debaters of the age, like Paul referred to in the early chapters of 1 Corinthians, the philosophers of the age would have had wealthy patrons who backed them, who supported them as they traveled from one place to the other.

And so, but that's not the only thing that's happening. Even there's a biblical ethic as well and practice in place. Look in verse 4 and 5 of 1 Corinthians. It's natural and the practice and the custom for even other apostles to be supported by those they minister to.

Some of them even bring along their wives on their visits to the churches. And they are expected and rightly so supported by those who they minister to.

And so that's the point that Paul is making when he starts off this chapter 9, when he says, am I not free? He's saying by that, he says, do I not have the right?

[8:35] Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord, which is the sign of an apostle? Are you not, speaking of the Corinthians, are you not my workmanship in the Lord?

If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you. I founded this church. I preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to you. You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

So this is what Paul's writing to the church in Corinth. You are the proof of my apostleship. My coming to you was not in human wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

Your very faith in Jesus is through my apostolic ministry. But Paul is not so much here defending his apostleship as he is emphasizing his rights as an apostle.

He's emphasizing his right to have financial support and to be taken care of as he is owed.

[9:40] This is his right. And Paul established his freedom and right to claim this support, only then to go and say, I renounce those rights.

I give up those rights to claim financial support from you. Why? Paul wanted them to see how his ministry among them is an example of forgoing his right that he has forgoing it for the sake of Christ's gospel and for the sake of Christ's church.

In fact, what's going on already in the Corinthian church is that in their foolish, worldly thinking, they've begun to question Paul's apostleship on the grounds that he was weak, on the grounds that he seems unsophisticated, like them.

And it's largely probably the strong, the well-off people in the Corinthian church who are especially questioning his apostleship. Part of the allegations against him, accusations against him, is that he is not actually standing on his rights as he ought to, as they would expect him to.

Someone of his caliber should be supported, like all the great philosophers of Corinth. And he should stand upon that right. After all, that's what they're accustomed to doing.

[11:11] And so Paul isn't doing this, so they start to question his apostleship. They would not allow themselves to be disrespected, to be considered less than the important people that they are.

And so why is Paul allowing himself to be treated the way he is? Why is he not standing upon his right? Paul and his ministry had become an embarrassment to some in the Corinthian church. They're like teenagers who don't want to be seen with their uncool, dowdy dad in front of their friends. That's what seems to be happening now in the Corinthian church.

They see Paul as not refined enough. He's already self-consciously chosen not to employ the sophisticated language and method of the debaters of Corinth.

Remember he says that in chapter 1 and 2. I chose not to employ the sophistry of the Corinthian debaters. He doesn't use the flowery language of the philosophers.

[12:23] The turn of phrase to impress them. He doesn't use that. Instead, he said he preached the gospel to them in weakness. What he means by that is that I preached the gospel in plain language.

In unflowery, unsophisticated language. so that you may know that it is the power of God that brought you to Christ. Not anything that you may not boast in anything else.

But that's not all. Not only has he chosen not to employ the means of rhetoric that philosophers and the Corinth employ, but not only that, he's also, he and Barnabas also took on manual labor to provide for themselves rather than get patrons to support them.

Now, we know in Acts that Paul worked as a tent maker. And if you go in Acts, actually, in Corinth, he worked with, probably, actually, for Aquila and Priscilla while he was in Corinth.

Tent making is hard, grueling work. I don't know what you think, when you imagine the word tent making, it's not your, you know, nice, you know, tent that you just pull up and you let something out and it pops up.

[13:51] These, these are, tent making in Paul's day is working with leather. You cut the leather, you tan the leather, and then you sew them into tents.

It's grueling, hard work. And he worked by day as a tent maker and then he preached the gospel in the evening in the synagogues. And the gospel went forth in power.

Even though this seemingly weak, unsophisticated man was the one preaching the gospel. the gospel went forth in power and people in Corinth were brought from death to life.

The church was planted and the church grew. But Paul, now, who brought the gospel of power to them has now become, for some of them, an embarrassment.

Imagine for a moment why Paul would have been an embarrassment to them. Because I said, tent making is hard. Paul would have smelled like the chemicals used to tan leather in those days.

[15:07] He would have probably smelled. His fingers would have been discolored by those things he used to tan. to tan. He looked like a working man. And there are, Corinthians are quite snobbish.

Not very much unlike some people are snobbish and are there as well. Paul looks like a laborer. He looked like an, even though he was quite educated, highly educated even, he looked like an uneducated, weak, unsophisticated man.

And that was an embarrassment to some of them in the Corinthian church. Paul was the kind of man they could not introduce to their sophisticated, fashionable friends for fear that they would think less of them if they were to say, well, this is our pastor, this is the one who brought, this is our apostle who brought the gospel to us.

He leads our church. Paul would have been an embarrassment to them. And so, this is probably some of the reasons why they start to question his apostleship.

And so, having established a parallel, Paul is, that's what Paul is doing here, he's established a parallel to the strong among them regarding his rise as an apostle.

[16:25] Now, Paul made an opposite conclusion than they were making. Notice that Paul is saying, like you, you think you have a right to eat the meat that is offered because meat means nothing.

I also have a right to be supported. I have a right to claim my right to support financial support, material support. But what is the conclusion that Paul made regarding these rights?

He forgone those rights for the sake of love. They, on the other hand, insist on standing on their right even though it would wound their fellow brother or sister.

It's important for us to see now that Paul's defense and claim of his apostleship was not an appeal to his authority. He's not trying to grandstand before them.

Rather, it's a description of the apostolic office itself. The conclusion that Paul makes is that that he's making to these Corinthians is that in keeping with the call to be an apostle, he is actually imitating Christ.

[17 : 35] Apostles, who are they? Who are they sent by? By Christ himself. They are called the sent ones. That's what it means to be an apostle. To be sent. Apostles are to bear witness to Christ.

This is how one of the church pastors, Christ Suston, describes the office of an apostle. Apostles are those who point away from themselves and point to Christ.

Apostles are windows by which people may see Jesus Christ. Not them, but Jesus Christ. Apostles are to give an example of faithful gospel ministry to follow in the way they steward the agency that God has given them.

And they are to prioritize the message. and the one who will send them rather than themselves who are the messengers. And so the message and the manner of their ministry is meant to be cruciform. That is cross-shaped. They are to call, they are called to visibly, apostles are called to visibly share in the suffering of Christ.

[18 : 51] Apostles are not triumphalists. who go ahead of the procession in victory. Rather, as Paul describes them, apostles are captives.

Captives by the gospel and the call. And they are the ones who come as captives of Christ and slave it.

That is how Paul often describes himself. The slave of Christ. This is why Paul can say in Colossians 1.24, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body that is the church.

That's what apostleship looks like. It is humble, sacrificial, self-denying, dying for the sake of Christ and the sake of his gospel.

And so, having presented his apostleship of himself and of Barnabas as an example of what sacrificial love is, he now gives two further analogies to support his argument.

[20 : 06] So, from verse 1 to 6 he says, I'm an apostle, I have this right, but I do not lay claim to those rights. And then he says in verse 7, he first gives this example, who serves as a soldier at his own expense?

Who plants a vineyard without eating of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? What are the examples he's giving here? These are real life examples. A soldier is not expected to provide for his own food and lodging while serving at war.

In fact, a good leader knows to feed his army or he risks defeat or at worst at best or at worst he risks mutiny.

And so he says, look, even soldiers are expected to be provided for food and shelter. And what of the one who plants a vineyard and toils in that vineyard?

He expects naturally to get a share in the fruit when it's ripe for plucking. And what of he who tends a flock a shepherd?

[21 : 17] He expects to get the milk from the animal that he's taking care of. All of these are natural and expected. But even further than that, more than that, even Scripture affirms this principle.

Verse 8, Paul seems to be saying, do I say these things on my own human authority? No. does not the law itself say the same? And by the law he means the law of Moses.

And so he quotes from Deuteronomy 25 verse 4, you shall not muzzle an ox when it threads on the grain. And Paul is saying it's not primarily the oxen that God is concerned about, although God is very much concerned about the beast.

And the commandment applies to it, right? And so if the commandment applies to this oxen, then it should even more so apply to the promotion of human dignity and justice.

And that's what God is primarily concerned about. If you will not muzzle your ox as it threads on the threshing floor and you allow it to take some of the, from what it's threshing to eat, how much more should you take care not to exploit your fellow man, especially your brother in Christ?

[22 : 48] Paul's argument, all of these arguments are leading to the conclusion that he makes then in verse 10 to 12. Does he not suddenly speak for our sake? Isn't this law for our sake?

That's what Paul's argument is. It was written for our sake because the plow man should plow in hope and the treasure, threshing hope of sharing in the crop.

If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you. If others share in this rightful claim on you, do not we even have a right to more share in this claim?

And so, without, he's laid out his argument. I deserve as a right to be supported.

I deserve to be, to, to, all of the, these rights that I have. But then he goes on in verse 12.

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, of this freedom that we have.

[23 : 57] We have not made use of it. We've endured, rather, we endure anything, rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Verse 13, do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?

In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. So, again, he says, I forgo this right, but nevertheless, it is a right that even the Lord commands, that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

Verse 14 there is one of the many proof texts for supporting ministers of the gospel. But that's, again, Paul's main point is to eventually emphasize how he forgoes, voluntarily forgoes, chose not to make use of the right that he has.

And I should quickly add here that Paul isn't saying or suggesting that pastors should forgo this right, as he did. That's not what he's suggesting.

So if you're thinking of coming to me after the service, or going to the vestry, and having a word with them about this, don't bother. Alright? Actually, in all seriousness, as your pastor, I'm very grateful that you take the Lord's command in verse 14 seriously, here at Holy Trinity.

[25 : 30] I'm grateful for that. But Paul is not opposed, of course, to receiving support for his ministry. He, even himself, is not opposed to it. In other places, he did receive support, and he was supported.

If you read Philippians, for example, he writes to the Philippian church, and he thanked them, and he boasts about them, for their financial support of his ministry. So Paul is not proud, he's not being prideful here, that's not why he's refusing to be supported by the Corinthians.

Nor is he criticizing other apostles who receive financial support. But in Corinth, Paul determined not to take any financial support from patrons, for one reason, and one reason only.

he knows that if he were to do so, it would impede and muddle up his gospel message among them.

And that's why he didn't. Because the Roman mindset, the Corinthian mindset of patronage, was so enforced in a place like Corinth.

[26 : 40] The Corinthians who worship power, who worship status, they would have made up their mind if Paul had taken their financial contributions.

It would have impeded the gospel among them. They might then start to think that they had something to do with the power of the gospel as it comes out from Paul.

They might think that it's because of them that that is happening. And so Paul made up his mind as he gets to Corinth to preach in simple words and powerful, no less powerful, no less convincing, but he made up his mind not to employ the method of the rhetoricians.

But then he also made up his mind not to take anything by way of financial support from the Corinthians. Because Paul knows doing so would impede the gospel.

It might also do this. It might encourage an unnecessary division and claim to ownership of Paul from the wealthy members of the church. Imagine, they will expect Paul to favor them, since they're the one that are buttering his biscuits.

[27 : 59] Right? So they would expect Paul to favor them. And because of the Corinthians' spiritual immaturity, Paul knows that they might expect to have a say, even in Paul's message.

They might demand, they might expect to make a demand on Paul to tailor his style of speaking to the Corinthian way. They will in fact, in effect, start acting as patrons of not only Paul, but they would now start acting as patrons of the gospel message itself.

Thinking they own the gospel message. They will start to sit in pride over the proclamation of the gospel rather than sit under it in humility.

And so Paul doesn't want that. And what of the poor among them? Those who could not support Paul, who couldn't give to his ministry, they might start to think that because they don't have the means to support Paul's ministry, they're not deserving of the gospel message.

As if the gospel is something to buy. And so for all these reasons, Paul could not allow the gospel message to be taken captive like that.

[29:15] That's why he chose not to take anything from them. That's why Paul then says to them, I will rather forego my rights and my privilege for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of your souls.

So he again repeats in verse 15, I have made no use of any of these rights that are mine, nor am I writing these things to you to secure any such provision.

I would rather die, Paul says, than have any one of you deprive me of my ground for boasting. I would rather die than have any of you deprive me of my ground for boasting.

What does Paul mean by his ground for boasting here? We should remember that back in chapter 1, Paul had explained that the contrast between futile human boasting in its wisdom and boasting in the Lord.

Paul had said to them that in the Lord, the Lord has gifted his wisdom to us. Not because we earned it, not because of our mental equity, but it's by grace, unsought for and unearned.

[30:27] Yet we have all received God's wisdom that is in Christ and him crucified. this is the ground of Paul's boasting because he is also a recipient of this wisdom.

The gospel of Jesus Christ by which he was saved is the ground for his boasting and he would not let anyone deprive him of that. And that's why he writes, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. That's why Paul says, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ everything, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of what?

Because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, but that which comes true faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

This is the ground of Paul's boasting. Others have interpreted verse 15 to say that I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for glorying rather than boasting.

[31:51] I think Paul's boasting for Paul, boasting actually means glorying in God's gracious work of salvation which brought him from death to life.

Paul is jealous for that. He's jealous to keep that perspective. He would not let anything threaten his glorying or boasting in the gospel.

or that I can say the same as your pastor in my ministry here. Or that you can say the same in your ministry to your fellow brother and sister in the household of faith.

That together we would proclaim Christ and him crucified. That we would not be swayed by the fear of man. That we would be jealous to God the deposit of the gospel of justification by faith alone, to grace alone, to the glory of God alone.

That is what Paul is doing. That's what he's so jealous to God. Oh that we will follow his example. Verse 16 Paul says for if I preach the gospel that gives me no ground for boasting for necessity is laid upon me.

[33:18] He's been called. He's been sent. That's the necessity that's laid upon him. And so he says woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.

For if I do this of my own will I have a reward. But if not of my own will I am still entrusted with a stewardship. how is the gospel given to Paul?

The gospel was presented to him as it is to all of us free of charge. And so Paul delights in freely discharging his call to proclaim the gospel.

He will not be bound by man's expectations or be limited in his ministry nor will he allow anyone in their folly like the Corinthians are trying to do to lay claim to ownership over his gospel and the agency the Lord has entrusted to him to proclaim it.

And so if his own labor and not taking any money from any patrons in Corinth will allow him to do that, Paul will gladly do it. Again, I want to impress on us the very thing that Paul is describing here is work.

[34:40] It's not it was tasking on him. To work as a tent maker which is a physically arduous thing when he could easily have taken claim of support.

But he rather will not do that in order not to compromise the gospel. And so as Paul presents himself as an example to the Corinthians, let him be an example to us as well here at Holy Trinity. Freely, brothers and sisters, freely you have received the gospel of Jesus Christ. Freely give. Do you not lay any claim to any right that may be even yours, my right, but be willing to forego those rights, to lay those rights down, to deprive yourself even, for the sake of the gospel.

Notice that that is why Paul is doing it, is for the sake of the gospel. And then Paul ends in verse 18 here, then he says, what then is for doing all of this, what then is my reward?

that in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make use of my right in the gospel. So, what is your reward?

[36:09] Think about it, what is your reward? If we are to follow the example of Paul here, what is your reward? What is our reward? If we love one another sacrificially, if we deprive ourselves, or extend ourselves for the sake of the gospel, or for the sake of the church of Christ, and other members in the body of Christ, what is our reward?

The reward is in the doing. The reward is in the loving. That's what Paul's point is here. Just like the joy that comes upon you when you see the joyful face of someone you love, as they open a gift, a precious gift that you've given them.

And it makes you more joyful to just see their joy. That's what happens. The reward is in knowing that the gospel has taken root in you, and among you, and bears fruit.

The reward is knowing that you are Christ, and he is yours forevermore. That you are Christ, and he is yours forevermore.

that's the reward. Brothers and sisters, there is no greater reward anyone can ever receive. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

[37:39] Amen.