

Together for Gospel Ministry

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[0 : 00] All right, if you've got a Bible 1 Corinthians chapter 9, 1 Corinthians chapter 9 will be where our passage will be this evening.

We're continuing in a series we started a few weeks ago called Together. The first week we looked at together as his body. We're talking about the importance of the local church, the significance of our being together as a body.

And week one we talked about the fact that the church belongs to Jesus. We are his church and the value of something is directly related to the significance of the owner.

And so if the owner of the church is Jesus, then therein lies our significance and importance. Then we looked at last week together in unity.

And we looked in Ephesians and talked about this idea. That Jesus not only purchased your salvation at the cross, he purchased our unity at the cross.

[1 : 29] When the Jews and Gentiles were not getting along, Paul said, listen, Christ has destroyed the hostility and made you one in Christ.

So we talked about the importance of our unity together. And then tonight we're going to look at together for gospel ministry here in 1 Corinthians 9. Now, before we dive in, I've got a very important announcement to make.

I'm a little bit like excited and slightly sad to make the announcement. I've been in ministry for a little over 25 years. Yes, I'm that old.

And I've actually never had in all my years of ministry a sabbatical. And those of you that don't know what a sabbatical is, it's kind of based out of the Old Testament Sabbath rest.

It's something that pastors do usually after an extended amount of time to kind of have some rest and renewal in ministry. And it's a very good thing for pastors to do.

[2 : 28] And I've never had one. And when Faith Family started, I knew that I needed one. But I also knew that it wasn't going to be anything I could do in kind of the early stages.

Because there was just so much going on in getting Faith Family going. But now we feel like we're at a place where there's been a great foundation laid. And we've just got such a great team of volunteers.

And a lot of things are established that now would be a good time for me to take a sabbatical. And so what I'm going to do, most sabbaticals are usually about 10 years.

I'm just kidding, all right? I'm just kidding. Most sabbaticals are usually about three months or so. But I'm only going to do five weeks, okay? I'm just going to do a five-week sabbatical.

And so here's kind of the basic information that I want to share with you so that you're informed. My sabbatical is going to start June 1 or the beginning of June.

[3 : 28] We also feel like that the month of June is a good month in the ministry calendar for me to be away for an extended period. There's not a lot that usually happens in the month of June.

And so that's when it will start. So I will preach Memorial Day weekend. And then I will start the sabbatical. The focus of my sabbatical is really just going to be on renewal as well as here's something that's kind of cool.

And I think that you'll get a benefit from this. And that is I'm joining about 30 other pastors. We don't know each other, but we're going to get to know each other. And that group of about 30 pastors are going to take two weeks.

And we're going to take a tour through the missionary journey of the Apostle Paul. And so we're going to go to places like Athens and Corinth and Thessalonica and Ephesus and we'll end in Rome.

And so I'm going to go and do this intense study. And then when I come back to Faith Family, and yes, I'm coming back, Faith Family, I'm going to preach the book of Acts.

[4 : 32] And so I'm going to take the things that I study and learn in my time of sabbatical that hopefully will enrich that study that we do together as a Faith Family as we study through the Acts.

So that's going to be one of the, that's kind of the big thing. And the rest is really based around some intentional things I'm doing for rest and renewal in my own life.

So this is a good thing for me, and it's a good thing for Faith Family as well. Dr. Chad Brand, if you were a part of our Holy Spirit conference back in January, he was the main speaker.

He is actually going to come in and preach all five weeks of that sabbatical. So he's going to do a series through the month of June, and that way you have a consistent voice.

Dr. Brand was one of my former professors way back when I was in seminary. And so he is very equipped, very knowledgeable, and you will be very blessed to sit under his teaching during this time.

[5 : 37] So the pulpit will be in great hands there. And then our leadership team, staff, pastors, they will handle all the other duties that need to take place at Faith Family while I'm gone.

So we just felt like this is something we should probably announce so that you're aware of. This is a good thing. It is a blessing both in my life, and I hope it will be a blessing for Faith Family as I come back rested and renewed and hopefully really excited to teach the book of Acts after all the things I'll get to see and learn.

So I want you to know that. I'm excited to announce that. I'm a little sad to announce that because for five weeks I won't see you. But I look forward to the return.

And so, again, I'm here until Memorial Day weekend, and then starting in June that will take place. So pray for me during that time, and do not message me. All right?

So I will block you. So I'm kidding. I'm kidding. All right. So wanted you to know that. Let's get to our text tonight. That was kind of a lengthy announcement, but one that we felt like we needed to give some time to.

[6 : 48] Tonight's passage is one of the most dynamic and influential passages for me as I have thought about ministry and ministry as it relates to the local church.

And so let's look here at 1 Corinthians 9, and we're going to begin at verse 19 and read down through verse 23, even though we'll look at a lot of other passages in this context.

Some of you are already standing. So if you're able, please stand as we honor the reading of God's Word. The Apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth, a place I'll get to visit, by the way.

And he writes these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

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 being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law.

[7 : 50] 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. To the weak, I became weak.

That I might win the weak. I've become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. And I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I might share with them in its blessings.

This is God's word. Pray with me and for me as we ask God to teach us tonight. Lord, I thank you for this time of worship that we've had this evening and the time now as we open your word and we study it.

And pray, Lord, that you would give us this same mindset that the Apostle Paul gives us here as we think about our doing ministry together. So come, Holy Spirit, and guide us into truth.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. You can be seated. Well, if there is one thing I've learned living in Minnesota for many years, it's that the Minnesotans love their football.

[9 : 03] Maybe a little bit too much, to be honest. And it really doesn't matter if you're a Vikings fan, if you're a Packers fan, if you're a Bears fan. I'm not even going to mention the Lions because I don't even think they have a football team.

But if you're any of the other fans, like, you're all pretty committed. You love Midwestern football.

And why is it that people love Midwestern football so much?

It's because we're tough, right? And we're tough in the Midwest. We will hit you so hard, your mama will feel it. Like, that's how tough we are.

We will set out in the freezing cold weather, and by we, I mean you, right? And watch a game. There is something about football in this area where we pride ourselves on being tough. But, of course, none of those examples really compare to the toughness of a former San Francisco 49er defensive legend, Ronnie Lott.

[10:04] Lott was an all-pro football player in three different positions, considered by many as one of the finest defensive backs in NFL history, known for his hard hitting and his tough-nose approach to the game.

He was a tough man. In fact, here's an example of just how tough he was. But in 1985, with the team on the way back to the playoffs, Lott ran into a buzzsaw.

Ronnie Lott hurt his left hand on that play. Oh, yeah, they caught it right there. I'm sure he has one of those flaxes where the bone comes through the skin because there is Lott involved in that thing. When his damaged hand muffled his attack, rather than risk missing a game, Lott had his finger chopped off, losing one digit in our number three gutziest performance.

What? Are you serious? Like, first of all, if you voluntarily had a finger removed for a football game and you were only third on the all-time gutsiest, like, what do you have to do to be number one, right?

[11:16] I mean, as crazy as that sounds, Ronnie Lott injured his finger, and rather than waiting until the off-season to have surgery, he had it removed.

Now, why in the world would somebody cut their finger or part of their finger off for a football game? And the reason was is he didn't want to let his team down.

Ronnie Lott was a leader on the 49ers, and he was more than just a great player. He was a team player, and I want you to lean in and listen to this. He was the kind of man that played for something greater than himself.

He saw the team far greater than he did his own discomfort. Now, Faith Family, all of us know that there are things in life where we sacrifice for something greater than ourselves, do we not?

I mean, most of us here have probably not given up a body part for a football game, but I bet some of you parents know what it's like to sacrifice those extra hours of work to create a better opportunity for your children.

[12:31] I bet there's people in this place tonight that have sacrificed that higher-paying job to work in a healthier environment. There are people that have sacrificed financially to help other people in need.

There are people that have sacrificed your time or your schedule to help someone else. If you stop for a moment to think about it, my guess is in some way or another, you have been in a situation where you had to sacrifice self for something greater than yourself.

And let's be honest, that is not an easy thing to do, is it? Because self tends to be the thing we value the most, if we're honest.

Most of us are pretty wrapped up in our own lives, our own needs, and our own desires. That is exactly what has happened in the church of Corinth.

Corinth. The church of Corinth has become consumed on a host of issues about themselves. So much so that the ministry that God has called them to is on the back burner.

[13:44] It is taking a second place to the things they want the most. Let me give you just a few examples. For instance, the Corinthians are fighting over who has the best spiritual gift.

There are some saying, I speak in tongues. And others are like, well, yeah, but I have a gift of teaching. Yeah, yeah, but I have a gift of giving.

And the Apostle Paul writes, for instance, 1 Corinthians 13, what you often hear at a wedding, which is kind of about a wedding, but not really. What Paul is addressing there is, I don't care if you speak with the tongues of angels.

I don't care if you give everything away. If you don't have love, it doesn't matter. If you're so obsessed with how good you are and how great your giftedness is, which, by the way, came from God anyway, that you forget love, I don't care what your gift is.

Or in another place in Corinthians, they're talking about, well, I follow Paul. Yeah, but I follow Apollos. I'm better than you because the Apostle that I follow is greater than your Apostle.

[14:57] And Paul just says, stop! It's the Lord who gives the increase anyway. I mean, all Paul and Apollos at best are, are men sowing seeds for God.

It's God who brings the harvest. And in that sense, neither one of those men have any ground for boasting or the people that follow them. Or what about another issue where they're fighting to see who'll be the first in line at the Lord's Supper?

On and on and on and on, these Corinthians have a problem. Are you listening, faith family? And their problem is they are absorbed in themselves. When they think about church life, it's not about being together.

It's about me and my gift and my desires and my preferences. And so the Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, addresses this issue and he calls them to come together for the sake of ministry.

Here's kind of the big idea of the text. Notice it on the screen. Paul is saying, listen, I'm asking you, put aside self for ministry service. There's something bigger to sacrifice for.

[16:15] There's something greater to give your life to. And it's not you, it's the ministry of God. So sacrifice, not for secondary things, but for the primary thing.

And come together. Let's go back and pick up the context in chapter 8 and verse 1. I love this passage. Here we go. Verse 1, chapter 8, Paul says, Now, concerning, so here's another one of the issues that they're fighting over.

Concerning food offered to idols, we know that all of us possess knowledge. This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. So let's break down the issue that's taking place here in 1 Corinthians 8 and 9. The issue is whether or not you are free to eat meat.

Whether or not you are free to eat meat. And there were some that believed that you could eat meat. And there were others that believed you shouldn't eat meat.

[17:25] My wife refuses to eat meat because she feels it's cruel to animals, which, interestingly enough, is the same reason why I don't eat vegetables. I'm a vegetable rights activist.

Except for the potato. They can't feel anything. I do love animals. I've never looked at a cow and thought, I want to eat that. But once that cow is slaughtered, drained of all its blood, chopped up, and put on a grill, I get hungry.

Cow. Cow. So that's the issue here in the Corinthians. Can we eat meat or can we not eat meat? And, of course, this has really never been an issue that, in my 25 years of pastoring, I've never really come across this issue in churches today.

There's not a lot of, like, First Baptists of the Vegans or something like that. Whether you can eat, you may have convictions on what you think about meat or not. This is not really something that divides the church.

So why was something like this an issue in Corinth? Here's why. In Corinth, you need to keep in mind, there were lots of pagan temples that would worship many different gods.

[18:40] And what you would do is that you would offer up a sacrifice to those gods. And one of the things that you would sacrifice would be the best cut of meat.

So you would take the best cut of meat and you would lay it at an altar before an idol and you would offer that up as a sacrifice. Are you still listening? Then they would take that best cut of meat and they would take it and sell it out back in the market.

You could say this was the original outback steak. No, not? You liked it? Okay.

I'm no Jim Gaffigan, but here we go. So that's what happens. And what happened as a result of this is two groups emerged. One group is what Paul calls in the text the knowledgeable.

These are the meat eaters. Let me introduce them to you in verse 4. Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that, quote, so here's what they would say, an idol has no real existence.

[19:47] There's no God but one. This is their argument. And although they may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there's one God, the Father, from whom all things, and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, to whom are all things, and through whom we exist.

Here's the argument from the knowledgeable, the meat eaters. We aren't worshipping the idols. We worship God. We worship the Trinity.

We devoted to Him, not any of these other false gods. And we happen to like meat. We love God, and we love meat.

I mean, that's like religion in the South. Love God, country, and meat. Like that's born and raised in Tennessee. And so that's what they were saying is, listen, listen, we're not involved in all this idol worship.

We love God. We worship God. And we like good food. So we're free to eat. There was another group.

[20 : 58] Paul will call them the weak. These are the non-meat eaters. Pick it up in verse 7.

However, not all possess this knowledge, but some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience being, what?

Weak is defiled. So here's the other group. There were people that became Christians. They were saved out of the pagan background. And so they had been involved in all that idol worship.

And the Lord saved them out of that. And do you know what they don't have the ability to do?

Listen, they don't have the ability to disassociate the meat with the worship of the idol.

So they think if you eat that meat that was offered to an idol, you are in essence worshipping the idol.

And they couldn't disassociate that. And because they couldn't disassociate that, they would say to other Christians, you can't eat meat either.

And thus, the division that's taking place here in Corinth. Now, as I said, I have not seen the issue of eating meat or not eating meat in churches, but I have certainly seen others.

[22 : 19] One would be drinking. Can a Christian drink alcohol? We would rule out, obviously, getting drunk. That's obvious in the scripture that that's a sin. But is a Christian free to drink?

And there are some, I have been around many Christians, that would say, no, if a Christian drinks alcohol, that's sin. And then there are others that would say, excuse me?

Like, don't step on my freedom. The Bible doesn't teach that. I'm free to have a glass of wine. Or so on it would go. Or recreational gambling. Or going to certain movies.

Or listening to certain types of music. One of the men that disciplined me when I was in college, he played in the, I guess it was the ABA, before it was the NBA.

Way back, Pete Maravich days and all that. And he was surrounded by secular music. And when the Lord saved him, he could no longer listen to that music because he associated it with a lifestyle he was trying to leave behind.

[23 : 26] And so he simply couldn't listen to certain types of music. And so in this context, it would be like them saying, and no one can listen to that music.

So who wins? What happens as a result, and I know this is going to shock you, is a fight breaks out in Corinth. And the meat eaters and the non-meat eaters are back and forth and back and forth and they're not together.

The knowledgeable are saying, hey, stop limiting my freedom. I can have that steak if I want it. And the weak are saying, no, no, no, no, you must, your conscience must be like mine. You must follow my rules.

And all the while, the apostle Paul does this. I cannot believe this is even happening. This is what you're consumed in. This has become the focus of your church.

They've lost their togetherness because they are obsessed in their own ways. Somebody say, preach, preacher.

[24 : 28] Now I am thankful it doesn't happen anymore in churches. Like, this was a problem back in the ancient Near East. No churches deal with this today, but I'll continue to preach the sermon anyways, just in case.

So how does Paul address the Corinthian church that has lost their togetherness? Verse 1 of chapter 8. Now concerning food offered to idols, we know that all possess knowledge and this knowledge puffs up.

But say it with me, faith family, love builds up. It's the same argument in 1 Corinthians 13. In other words, Paul is saying, do you realize that, listen, I need you to come in here, faith family.

Do you realize there's actually something greater than your freedom? Meat eaters? Do you realize there's actually something greater than your rules and your tradition?

Non-meat eaters? It's called love. And on that issue, you're both wrong. Because you have let your preferences and your own convictions get in the way and your own convictions, get in the way of the thing that matters most.

[25 : 41] And that is your love for one another. You're more consumed about meat than you are love? Are you outside your minds? Sacrifice yourself.

And the freedom you think you have or the rules you think ought to be followed, give up those secondary issues for something greater, love. Because your togetherness for the sake of ministry is far greater than your individual freedom or your individual traditions.

Somebody say, preach, preacher. I, exactly. That's about the response I expected, right? Faith family, this is not a church problem. This is a people problem.

And it can happen in a marriage. It can happen in a, between a parent and a child. It can happen in a work environment. Anytime you make a secondary, non-essential issue greater than love, you are divided and you are unhealthy as it relates to the priorities of the gospel.

Paul says, you got to come together here, Corinthians, and put these secondary issues aside. And the way he's going to call them to do that is by giving himself as an example.

[26 : 59] Now we're into chapter 9, verse 1. Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus, our Lord? Are you not my workmanship in the Lord?

If to others I'm not apostle, that is, if others try to discredit me, that's one thing. But to you, for you, you're my seal of my apostleship in the Lord. The apostle Paul then brings his own example before the Corinthians to say, listen, you know me.

You know I'm an apostle. I have seen the Lord. I have all the credentials and you and the very fruitfulness that has come as a part of our work together. No. That God has made me an apostle.

And if I'm an apostle, that means I have rights. And he'll go on and tell you what those are in chapter 4, or verse 4 rather. He'll say, I have the right to food and drink.

That is, I have the right to have my expenses paid. To cover the things necessary to do the ministry.

Second, in verse 5, I have the right to a family. I have the right to take that.

[28 : 04] Paul didn't. Third, is I have the right to financial support. Verse 6, after all, what soldier serves at his own expense or what farmer doesn't share in his own harvest?

Look at verse 11. I'm having fun. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? In other words, Paul is saying, listen, if it's true that a farmer can enjoy part of the harvest, how much more is that not true with spiritual seeds?

I have rights. I am an apostle. You know that I could demand these things, but I don't. When it comes specifically to you, Corinthians, I haven't asked you for a thing.

I didn't make my rights primary. I didn't make the things that I had the authority to ask for. But I didn't do it because the ministry was more important than that.

My rights ultimately take a back seat to what's most important for the sake of the gospel. And that's what Paul is calling them to come together on.

[29 : 20] And look at verse 15. He says, but I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting.

In other words, what Paul was saying, and the apostle Paul is not a perfect man, but he is a man of God. And what he is saying is this. When it comes to the ministry, by the grace of God, I want to be selfless.

I don't want it to be about me. I don't want it to be about my rights. I don't want it to be the way I think it should go. I want it to be what is most important so that the gospel can advance.

Listen, I don't want to be what prevents the gospel from moving forward. That's far greater to me than getting my needs met.

Are you with me? I can't tell if you've all fallen asleep or what. Paul is saying, this is what I want you to come together on. I want you to forget those secondary things like meat eating or not meat eating and make the gospel and the priority of the gospel the main thing.

[30 : 35] And there's three things that Paul will call them to by using his life as an example. Three things that we should come together on. Are you with me?

Three things that we should come together on. Number one is this. The clarity of the mission. The clarity of the mission. Five times in verses 19 through 22, Paul will say that his aim is to win people. Let's read it. Verse 19. We should see it. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all. You say what's in yellow. That I might win more of them.

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 being myself under the law. That I might win those under the law.

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. To the weak I became weak.

[31 : 37] That I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel.

You see Paul is very clear on why he's been put on earth and that is to see people won by the gospel.

And that's more important than meat. It's more important than your view on alcohol. It's more important than what music you like or don't think Christians should listen to.

There is nothing more important than the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when your rights or privileges or things you want get in the way of that, you will destroy the togetherness of a church.

Because the church has been brought together to win people. Let's be clear. Notice this on the screen. Faith family church exists to help people encounter God and experience grace through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 46] We are not here to give you the kind of church you want, to get your preferences met, to wash your car while you're in church, to enjoy some religious experience. We are here to sacrifice ourselves so that every time we come into contact with anybody, they have the opportunity to encounter God and experience his transforming grace through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That is why we're here. And even Wes needs to check himself to make sure his thoughts or his traditions or his ways don't get in the way of that.

We are together for the gospel. We are together for gospel ministry. That's why we exist. Max Lucado tells a story, many of you have probably heard it, but it's appropriate for this weekend as it's fishing opener.

But he talks about how his family would go on a fishing trip every year. And it was always something that he looked forward to with great excitement and anticipation. And one year they went on the fishing trip and the first day they got there, it just rained and rained.

He said, all we did was we stayed inside and we played board games and chess and things like that and got through the first day. Well, guess what? The second day it rained even harder.

[34 : 09] And at this point, like personalities are starting to clash and people are getting on each other's nerves. And then the third day got there and it was still raining. And just at this point, we were at each other's neck and we just decided we'd go home.

And here's what he writes of what he learned from that experience. Listen closely, church. Please listen. I learned a lesson that week, not about fishing, but about people.

When those called to fish don't fish, they fight. When energy intended to be used outside is used inside, the result is explosive.

Instead of casting nets, we cast stones. Instead of extending helping hands, we point accusing fingers. Instead of being fishers of the lost, we become critics of the saved.

The result, I love this, church scrooges. Bah humbug spirituality. Split churches, poor testimonies, broken hearts, legalistic wars while the poor go unfed, the confused go uncounseled, and the lost go unreached.

[35 : 21] When those called to fish don't fish, they fight. And that is exactly what had happened in Corinth, and I pray by God's grace it does not happen here. Paul says, come together on the clarity of the mission we exist to win all that we can win for the sake of the gospel.

Number two, is we also come together on the conviction of the message. The conviction of the message. I won't say much here other than to say, Paul, maybe more than anybody, of course he wrote much of the New Testament, so he's got more real estate, but he is known to be adamant of anybody that tries to mess with the gospel.

He does not have nice words to say. Look, for example, in verse 23, where he says, I do it all for the sake of the gospel.

You cannot mess with the gospel, according to the apostle Paul. When the Judaizers tried to influence the Philippians, saying that you need faith in Jesus plus circumcision, Paul will say, I hope to them the knife slips.

It's not a very nice thing to say. It really isn't. And yet Paul says, that's what I think about your theology. You are twisting and manipulating the gospel and I will have none of it.

[36 : 44] To the church in Galatia, the Galatians, he says, if anybody comes to you with a gospel other than the one that was delivered to us by God, let them be accursed. Paul doesn't have any room at all for compromising the gospel.

You don't mess with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is absolutely convicted, I pray we are absolutely convicted here at Faith Family on the gospel and we will not compromise it.

Amen? We know what our mission is. We want to win people. The way we say that is we want people to encounter God and experience His transforming grace through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We want to win all and we will not compromise the message to see that happen. And we will amen the first two. Yeah, clarity of mission, preach, preacher, woohoo.

Don't compromise the gospel. No, no, no. Man, we couldn't be more supportive of that. But then look at what he says. I want you to come together in a willingness to compromise compromise your methods.

[37 : 57] Compromise on the methods. Here's what Paul is saying. He's not saying on issues related to sin. It's why in the text he says, I'm still under the law of Christ.

I'm not suggesting that to the drug addict I'll do drugs. He's not suggesting that. But he's saying on issues that are not related to sin, I will compromise and flex on anything I need to compromise and flex on that they might be one to the gospel.

And so Paul starts by saying, and he can say this because he doesn't belong to anybody. Paul, this is, I'm loving teaching this. And I need it for my own life as well, so I hope that you're being taught through this as well.

But Paul says this statement, and every time I read it I think, what a profound statement. The Apostle Paul says, to the Jews I become a Jew.

Now why would that be a strange statement? Okay, let me put it a different way and see if it makes sense. What if I made the comment of to those born in Tennessee I become like those born in Tennessee.

[39 : 16] You'd say, you num num, you were born in Tennessee. the Apostle Paul is ethnically a Jew. So why would Paul say to the Jew, I'll become a Jew?

You'd almost want to say, hello, you are a Jew. but not in Paul's mind anymore. You see, Paul doesn't see himself as a Jew, therefore, he can flex to the Jews.

He doesn't see himself as a Gentile, he can flex to the Gentiles. Notice this on the screen. Paul isn't in the category of Jew or Gentile, Paul is in the category of Christian.

Christian. My ethnicity doesn't have anything to do with my standing before God. I'm not a Jew in that sense and I'm not a Gentile either.

I'm a follower of Christ. The Jews don't own me. The Gentiles don't own me. The Baptists don't own me. The Methodists don't own me. The young or old don't own me. Jesus owns me and because Jesus owns me, I'm free.

[40 : 21] I don't have to be enslaved to the Baptists. Thank you, Lord. I don't have to be enslaved to the traditions of whatever.

You know why? Because I'm in the category of Christian. I'm not Jewish. I'm not Gentile. I'm Jesus. Meaning I'm a follower of Jesus.

He's my identity. And the freedom that this gave the Apostle Paul, it's the freedom I long for us to experience as well. What it would mean is that when Paul was with a Jew, he wouldn't order brisket or pulled pork barbecue.

But if I invited Paul over to my family in Tennessee, he'd eat the whole pig. Paul, if with certain groups of Christians that didn't think you should drink alcohol, wouldn't drink.

When with the Lutherans, whiskey sour, please. And I'm being serious. Even to those of you that have stances on alcohol, I am speaking to you.

[41 : 29] I don't care whether you eat meat or not. I don't care whether you have a band or do lyric videos.

I don't care if you have pews or chairs. I don't care if your church building has a steeple or is in a bowling alley. Faith family, I don't care if you have a tattoo of Elvis where the sun don't shine. It's not a gospel issue. So I will not be owned by your rules. And if you have a conscience that leads you somewhere else, that's to be respected.

I will not be a slave to you because the Jews don't own me. The Gentiles don't own me. Jesus owns me.

And that gives me freedom to serve everybody. Second, Paul would say this because I want to win everybody.

[42 : 31] I don't belong to anybody because I want to win everybody. Now this is important for those of you amending what I was just saying and I would amen it as well. Listen, Paul isn't changing his eating habits or his dress code to be hip because what happens in churches is we want to dress a certain way because we want to be cool, right?

To the younger crowd, I dress younger so that they would like me. That is not Paul's motivation. No, Paul is saying if I need to dress differently, so that it's not a stumbling block to a certain group of people, I'll do that.

That they might be one. That's my motivation. My motivation is not to be cool. It's not to be hip. It's not to fit in. It's that people will be transformed by the power of the gospel.

We need to be careful what our motivation of freedom is. The reason, listen, the reason why a missionary when moving to a foreign country adapts to the language adapts to the dress codes, adapts to the norms, is not just to fit in, but so that there will not be any obstacle between them and the gospel.

It is for the sake of ministering to others. And I would remind us that missionaries are not just people that go to foreign countries. Missionaries are every Christian who has surrendered their life to following Christ.

[44 : 00] So I ask you, Ronnie Lott, what will you give up? What will you remove? Is it the music preference you have?

Is it the dress code you think should be applied? Is it certain political views that you have that are not anywhere central to the gospel? And again, I'm emphasizing, I'm almost done, hang with me. You have the right to have your traditions. You have the right to have your preferences. Do you know what everybody in this room has? Preferences.

Ask me how I know. We all have opinions and preferences and traditions and arguments that we would make, but you look at me, none of them are more important than the gospel.

Not even mine. And so Paul is saying to them, listen, you're going to have to be willing to flex.

You're going to have to be willing Ronnie Lott to give up something to come together for the sake of ministry.

[45 : 01] Notice this on the screen. A self-focused church cannot be a gospel-centered church. It cannot be. What is primary here must be the gospel.

And then finally, Paul would say, I don't belong to anybody. I love that. Jews don't own me. The Gentiles don't own me. And that gives me a freedom to minister to everybody. If I'm with the Lutherans, I can adapt to that.

If I'm with the Baptist, I can adapt to that. Because I belong to Jesus. I have the freedom, and I'm doing it because I want to see anybody and everybody one to the gospel.

And then lastly, and in doing so, I'm imaging someone. Look at verse 23 again. We'll close here. I do it all.

Look very closely. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in, and this is where the ESV slightly mistranslates it.

[46 : 05] In the original, it's not its blessings, it's share with them in it. I'm going to read that again. I do it all for the sake of the gospel.

All this flexing, all this healthy, biblical compromising, I do all of this for the sake of the gospel, that I might share with them in it.

In other words, I'm motivated by the gospel in order to participate in the gospel. You say, I don't understand.

Listen, Paul does this for the gospel because what's at the heart of the gospel? The one who had all the rights as God came into a fallen world to die a substitutionary death on a cross.

and he rose from the dead and offers life to those who would repent and believe. In other words, what Paul is saying is that at the heart of the gospel is the sacrificing of self for something greater.

[47 : 23] So when I chop off a finger for the sake of somebody's life, I'm not only proclaiming the gospel, I'm participating in it.

I'm actually experiencing, and I think that's where the ESV gets the idea of the blessings. I'm experiencing the very blessings of the gospel through sacrificing myself for something greater than myself.

If you are not willing to sacrifice your traditions or your preferences, then let me ask you this. What if Jesus had had that same approach to you?

In other words, what if Jesus would have been unwilling to say to the human, I'll become a human? We'd be in hell right now.

And yet, Jesus joyfully and gladly not only lost a finger, he lost his life for you.

[48 : 35] No one was more willing to give up their rights than the one we call Savior. So, faith family, tonight I ask you, are we willing to sacrifice self for the sake of something greater?

More than a willingness to lose a finger for a football team, are we willing to lose our lives for the ministry of the one who sacrificed his life for ours?

And in light of that sacrifice, let us sacrifice and do this ministry together.

And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this hard-hitting passage tonight. It is deeply convicting because I know for a lot of us, we've been in church life for so long that it's easy to make secondary issues primary issues.

I mean, we just have our own opinions or preferences or even things that are biblical, they're just not as significant as the gospel itself.

[49 : 47] And so, I pray for us as a church that our togetherness would be for the sake of gospel ministry, that starting with me and to everybody in this place, everybody watching online, I pray that our heart, our mindset would be, if there is anything I'm holding on to that prevents the advancement of the gospel, God, let me just let it go.

I sacrifice that for something greater than me. and so, Lord, help us. I pray by your spirit that you would give us practical application for what this looks like in our own lives.

And there may be people tonight upset with this message. I have no doubt that this was hard to hear for the Corinthians. But we are a people who are on mission with you, not on mission for ourselves.

And so, this cleansing of our own soul, of our own church, and thinking through what those obstacles may be is a good and beautiful thing.

So, Holy Spirit, do that for us, I pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.