

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

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[0 : 00] We are looking at 1 Corinthians chapter 9 this morning, verses 1 through 18. And I actually didn't write down the page number, but it's in your bulletin. So let me encourage you to turn there with me, 1 Corinthians chapter 9.

We're going to look at just the first half of this chapter this morning, and then we're going to come back to the rest next week. Let me pray for us as we're turning there.

God, we ask that you would now come and quiet our hearts and help us to listen well to the message of your word. God, we thank you that we can rest in you, that we can repose in you, Lord, that we find in you a great and gracious savior.

And Lord, we thank you for your word that instructs us and teaches us and above all reminds us of all that you've done for us in your deep love. Spirit, would you give us hearts that are eager and expectant to hear your word today?

We ask this, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen. 1 Corinthians chapter 9, verses 1 through 18. Am I not free?

[1 : 17] Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit?

Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority?

Does not the law say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thus you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.

Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope, and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.

[2 : 20] If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much? If we reap material things from you, if others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything, rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

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, 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 have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting.

For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting, for necessity is laid upon me. 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'm still entrusted with a stewardship.

What then is my reward? That in my preaching, I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

[3 : 48] Well, it's been observed that one of the great moral gains, one of the great moral advances of the second half of the 20th century is the idea that all people, not just some, are to be respected and valued.

All people, not just the rich and powerful, are worthy of dignity and respect. All people, including the weak and the poor, people of different color and different nationality, and so on. And for the last hundred plus years, this belief has commonly been expressed by speaking of human rights. Rights. The 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a great example. It says, and it begins by saying that, the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. But of course, we can find earlier examples that speak of human rights in a similar way. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.

But among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Famous lines, of course, from the 18th century Declaration of Independence. And I think we can all agree that a widespread acknowledgement of human rights is a great gain.

[5 : 13] As one writer put it, it's become a way of saying that we, the worldwide community, won't tolerate bullies who exploit people for their own ends. We say that people have rights in order to say that other people don't have the right to abuse or exploit them.

So talking about rights, affirming rights, is a good thing. And yet, it can also become problematic, can't it? If affirming human rights is one way of standing up for the weak, of affirming the dignity of all people, it can also become a way for people to justify their own selfish actions.

For instance, perhaps I technically have the right to play my favorite Taylor Swift albums nice and loud at 8 a.m.

on a Saturday morning. Because, let's be honest, nothing says, good morning, like a little Tay Swift. But the rest of my apartment building will probably be seething with their own bad blood, wishing in their wildest dreams that my apartment became a blank space and reoccupied by someone with a little more musical style.

So rights language by itself can be a bit problematic. It can easily be twisted to justify selfishness. My rights are, after all, my rights, and there's nothing you can do about it.

[6 : 42] But rights language is also problematic because rights can sometimes seem to collide. And haven't we seen this all too close to home? If your right to free speech and my right to a respectful learning environment come crashing into each other, how do we work things out?

And who gets to decide? So it seems that on the one hand our widespread affirmation of rights is a great gain, and yet our idea of rights by itself is still in need of something else.

Something over and above them, perhaps, that can help us know how to best make use of our many and good rights. In other words, how to really live together in ways that make for peace as opposed to selfishness and conflict.

Well, what, if anything, does the Bible have to say about this issue that presses down on us today? And we find, actually, it has quite a lot to say. In fact, our text this morning speaks directly to this issue of rights.

And it shows us both that it's proper to defend them, while at the same time it may be best to defer them.

[8 : 05] So let's look first at Paul's defense of his rights in verses 1 through 14 and see what we can learn. Now, remember the context of chapter 9. In the last chapter, we learned that the church in Corinth was divided over the issue of meat offered to idols.

Some thought they had the right to eat it, and others thought they most certainly did not. But the issue was more complicated than it seemed on the surface. Because for starters, there were lots of different places where you could come across meat offered to idols in an ancient city like Corinth. The first place was in an actual pagan temple itself. Most pagan temples had dining halls where you could share a meal. In fact, this is where a lot of the business and social networking happened in the ancient world, especially for the upper classes.

You didn't go to the Union League for lunch in the first century. You went down to the temple of so-and-so and shared a meal in the banquet hall where the table was set with some freshly prepared fillets recently sacrificed to whatever god the temple happened to be.

Did Christians have the right to eat meat in such a place? After all, we know that there's only one true god, right? And we know that these so-called gods and idols aren't really real after all, so why not?

[9 : 18] That's all some Christians in Corinth were thinking. But second, you could encounter meat offered to idols if your non-Christian friend invited you to their house for dinner. And maybe they

would explicitly say that this meat was offered in honor of Apollo, let's eat, or maybe they wouldn't. But remember, meat was a luxury for most people in the ancient world to be invited to a meal where they were serving meat was potentially a big deal. So what about there? Could you eat that meat then? Or should you refrain? Would you offend your host? Was that right? But third, it wasn't just in temples or in private homes that you'd encounter meat sacrificed to idols. Nearly all of the meat that you could buy in the general marketplace came from the leftover sacrifices in the temples. Anything that they didn't cook for the banquet halls was carried to the marketplace and sold.

So pretty much all of the meat in a city like Corinth was associated in one way or another with an idol. It was like trying to find a fast food restaurant in the 90s that didn't use partially hydrogenated oils.

[10 : 25] They just didn't exist. Whether you went to McDonald's or Wendy's or Burger King, you were going to be ingesting a healthy dose of trans fat. So it was with meat in first century Corinth.

You could probably trace it back one way or another to a sacrifice to some false god. So you see, the question of whether or not a Christian should eat meat sacrificed to an idol was a multi-sided question and that's why Paul takes three whole chapters to parse the thing out.

And as Greg mentioned last week, let me say as a sidebar this morning that today there are some moral issues that take some deep reflection and some nuance for us as followers of Jesus to parse out.

At least if we're going to do so in a way that does full justice to the truth of the gospel. In Paul's day, I'm sure there were people on both sides of the idol meat issue who wanted Paul to just say yes or no.

Should we or shouldn't we, Paul? Just tell us. But there was more to it than that. Now eventually Paul will deliver a clear yes, no, maybe.

[11 : 33] And if you haven't yet read ahead through chapter 10, spoiler alert, here's what he says. No to the meat in the idol's temple, yes to the meat in the marketplace, and maybe to the meat in the friend's house. So there are some guidelines Paul can lay down.

But there are deeper issues at play here. Deeper heart issues. Some Christians felt like they had a right to eat meat wherever, whenever.

But before Paul even parses out whether or not they have such a right and where and when and with whom and under what circumstances, he goes after their hearts.

He pushes them to think about how they should be using their so-called rights at all. and to do that, he gives them an illustration.

An illustration that they will know very well. An illustration that they've all experienced and seen and that will resonate with each one of them because they've all in some way benefited from it.

[12 : 43] Paul uses the illustration of himself. Chapter 9, what he's doing here is presenting himself as an example of how Christians ought to approach their rights.

And at first, he defends his right as an apostle, for example, to receive financial support from the churches he ministers in. This is my defense, he says in verse 3.

Here it is. And he does that in four ways. Real briefly, first, he uses some analogies from everyday life in verse 7, from common experience. Imagine a soldier marching off to war and risking his life but having to pay for his own body armor, his own machine gun and amusician, and his own food and drink.

That's ludicrous. Imagine planting a vineyard and not eating any of the fruit. Imagine working at J.Crew and not at least getting an employee discount so you can wear some of the clothes.

If all those examples seem ludicrous, well, Paul says, so is the idea of an apostle at least not having a right to some material support from the churches he's ministering in. Second, he uses an argument not from common experience but from scripture.

[13 : 54] In verses 8 through 12, he quotes a passage from the Law of Moses from Deuteronomy 25. You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain. Now, of course, the law wasn't just about oxen. It was laying down a principle about work, about labor, and moreover, about the just sharing of the fruits of the work with the workers.

And if it applies to oxen, then surely it applies all the more to humans, right? Third, Paul argues by analogy from the temple service in Jerusalem.

That's verse 13. If the Levitical priests have a right to receive their livelihood from their labors in the old covenant temple, shouldn't we apostles have a right to receive support from our service in the new covenant temple?

the church? The temple of the Holy Spirit, as he calls them back in chapter 3? And then fourth, Paul sort of brings it home, not by way of analogy, but by way of just straight command.

Verse 14, in the same way the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. The Lord here referring as it usually does in Paul to the Lord Jesus. If you come back to the evening service tonight by a strange working of providence, we're actually going to be studying Luke 10 where Jesus teaches that very principle.

[15:17] In Luke 10, 7, Jesus says in the context of mission and ministry that the laborer deserves his wages. And Paul will actually quote that same saying of Jesus in 1 Timothy chapter 5 along with his Deuteronomy verse about oxen where he makes the same point about ministers receiving support for their labors in the ministry.

Interesting, as a total rabbit trail, in 1 Timothy chapter 5, Paul says, as the scripture says, don't muzzle the oxen. The laborer deserves its wages. Very interesting.

The only place where we know that that saying of Jesus exists is Luke 10, 7. And Paul says, that's what the scripture says. Did Luke know, did Paul know about Luke's gospel?

Was he calling it scripture? Curious. Yes. Now, the main point of 1 Corinthians 9 isn't really about pastors being supported by their congregations.

Of course, this passage, along with some others like 1 Timothy 5 and Galatians 6, certainly teach that congregations should provide for their pastors. And I'm thankful, along with the other pastors here at Trinity, that you members of Trinity do just that.

[16:31] But, the main point here, remember, is that this is an illustration about how all of us Christians ought to approach our rights at all.

And Paul here at first defends them. As an apostle, he has certain rights and he can articulate them and provide ample evidence for them.

And I think as we think broadly about human rights today, we Christians should not be shy about defending and articulating the rights that we have as human beings.

At the highest level, the dignity and honor that every human being is worthy of. In fact, in a Christian framework of reality, the idea of human rights makes a whole lot of sense.

Does it not? If there is a good, wise, and holy God who created all things and created human beings uniquely in his image to know him and love him and reflect him in their life together, then all human beings certainly have dignity and worth and must not be trampled on or exploited.

[17:44] Every human person is of incomparable value. They do have rights. One of the ways in which we, I think as Christians, can serve the good of our community is by continuing to hold up a vision of reality based in God's goodness and holiness where we humans are filled with value and purpose and worth regardless of our status or position or ability or what have you.

Whether it's in our work life or cultural life or our church life that we keep saying that you and me and everyone regardless of what they believe are created in God's image and are worthy of infinite dignity and respect.

Because friends, the reality is a lot of the competing frameworks in which people live actually aren't very good at giving good reasons for why humans have something called rights and why we humans ought to be treated with dignity and respect.

If everything we see is simply the product of time and energy and chance and if human beings are just a collocation of chemicals and matter destined to be utterly extinguished when our sun expands and the universe rapidly races ever outward into cold dark oblivion.

We can certainly claim that human beings have something called rights but it's certainly hard to say why we have them or what indeed they are. I'm not saying you need to believe in God to be a good person.

[19:25] Most people I know who don't believe in God are actually quite moral but I'm suggesting that it's very hard to know why we ought to treat people a certain way.

Treat them a certain way regardless of circumstances regardless of the benefit which is what we mean by human rights right? it's hard to know why we ought to do that when there really is nothing to ground those rights in.

So we as Christians ought to keep holding up this vision of life where human beings have dignity and worth and where there is such a thing as human rights because of who God created us to be. Now of course speaking of our dignity and worth as human beings is perhaps speaking of rights at the highest possible level right? But what about all those other things we consider rights? Like Paul's right to receive financial support as an apostle or the Corinthians right to eat idol meat. For us today what about our widespread belief in the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

[20 : 35] Do we have a right? Don't we have a right to comfort and security and happiness? things? Or what about even smaller things? We could make a long laundry list of things that Christians potentially have the freedom or the right to do.

Drink alcohol. Get a sweet tattoo. Go dancing. Smoke a cigarette. Go to the movies. Support a political party. Drive a certain car. Live in a certain neighborhood.

Go to public school. Go to private school. Go trick-or-treating. Go to yoga. Listen to rock music. Drink caffeine. Save for retirement.

Go on vacation. Own a vacation home. Get married. Stay single. Have children. Don't have children. The list could go on and on and on and on.

What about all these sorts of rights? From the right to comfort and security all the way down to drinking a drink? What should our approach be to these sorts of individual rights?

[21 : 47] And here, friends, I think Paul challenges us. Look again at the second half of verse 12. Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

here is the criteria we ought to use when considering our rights and how to use them.

Even if we have a legitimate right, the question we must ask is, will making use of that right put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ?

Christ? And if so, then we ought to voluntarily defer making use of that right. And this is the second big point of our text this morning.

Even if we can defend a certain right with airtight biblical, theological, experiential arguments, we still ought to be willing to voluntarily defer it for the sake of others knowing and growing in Christ.

[22 : 56] Now, quickly note, Paul doesn't say that he's absolutely lost his right or totally, absolutely given it up. He still has the right to receive financial support. As an apostle, he'll always have that right.

And on top of that, he in no way says that we can force someone to refrain from using their legitimate rights. For Paul, it is voluntary. But still, the principle remains. If exercising a right puts a potential barrier between someone and the gospel, we ought to be willing to forgo exercising that right.

Think of Paul's situation. Here he was, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, commissioned to bring the saving message of Christ, crucified and risen to the Gentiles, to call them to faith in the one true God, to call them out of darkness into light, out of guilt and slavery to sin, an end to forgiveness and freedom.

But you know, for your typical first century city dweller, on the surface, Paul looked a lot like the traveling teachers and philosophers who were out to make a profit and make a name for themselves by charging money for whatever it was they were teaching.

You see, traveling teachers in the ancient world could support themselves in one of four ways, typically. They could charge fees for their instruction, they could get a wealthy patron, they could beg, or they could work at a trade and support themselves.

[24 : 35] And because begging and working were considered demeaning, most of the teachers went for the first two options. But because it was hard to find a wealthy patron, a lot of them just ended up charging money for their instruction.

Now, if paying money to receive instruction from a teacher who just happens to show up in your life sounds like a strange practice, just turn on public television some Saturday afternoon.

And what will you find? Some medical expert or some financial expert or some other expert giving a series of talks about how what they know will make your life better.

And if you call now, they will send you the DVD in the large format book containing the full series of talks with all the secrets and insights you need to be happy, healthy, wealthy, and wise.

Plus, you get the nice self-righteous tinge of supporting your local public TV station. Beth and I watch a ton of public television.

[25 : 40] There's nothing wrong with public television. But Paul knew that if he showed up in Corinth asking for money in response to his preaching, he would have seemed like just another Susie Orman or Joel Fuhrman.

People would have thought that this Christian thing was just another self-help philosophy, just another thing you can dabble in and pick and choose what works for you and what doesn't, just another thing that will give you a puffed up identity over and against your peers because after all, they don't have the secrets and insights that you now have.

And so rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel, Paul says he made no use of his right and endured anything. And we know from Acts chapter 18 a little bit of what that anything looked like.

Rather than receive financial support from the church that he was planting, he worked a job in the marketplace doing manual labor, building tents, which didn't just consume lots of time and energy, it also put him way down on the social ladder.

You know, today we think craftsmen are cool, especially if they grow beards and use words to describe their work like handcrafted or bespoke or artisanal.

[27 : 08] I mean, if Paul had made tents in Brooklyn today, he'd probably have his own show on HGTV. But in the first century, working with your hands didn't have any cultural clout.

It was looked down on and it was undignified because important people didn't work with their hands and influential people didn't work with their hands. And yet Paul was willing to endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel.

How about us, friends? Are we willing to endure anything? Are we willing to defer our rights so as not to put an obstacle between our neighbors and the gospel?

Or between our brothers and sisters in the church and their growth in the gospel? Which is what Paul is concerned about at the end of chapter 8. Now the tricky thing about concrete application here is that it's so relationship and context specific.

What throws an obstacle in the way of the gospel in one place or in one relationship might not do so in another. So this would be a great question as you go out to lunch today with your friends.

[28 : 30] A great question to discuss. What particular rights in my life, if I were to keep exercising them, might throw an obstacle in the way of the gospel? We need to be doing this kind of discernment in community, friends.

We need each other's eyes to see and to discern. But as I thought about it, here's one example for me personally as a pastor. And you might think this is crazy, but here it is.

I think as a pastor, I technically have the right to register with a political party, whether it be Democrat or Republican or Green or whatever. I also think that as a pastor, I have the right, in the right context, in the proper context, not from the pulpit or not from any gathered church setting, but in the proper context, I think I have the right to talk about who I'm personally going to vote for and why.

But you know, even though I certainly have that right, I'm probably not going to register with a political party. And I'm probably never going to talk a lot about who I vote for and why. How come? Because I think it would potentially put an obstacle in the way of the gospel for me as a pastor to strongly affiliate with any one party. Because ultimately, the church stands apart from any one political party, just as it stands apart from any one nationality or culture.

[29 : 55] And in my particular role as a pastor, I wouldn't want anyone to think that this church or the gospel itself means buying into a particular political platform or agenda, whether it's right or left or center or up or down.

Now, I'm not saying that all Christians should do the same thing, that all Christians shouldn't register with this or that party or shouldn't strongly advocate for a particular candidate. Surely, actually, there should be robust, articulate Christian voices in politics.

And I'm very thankful for those that exist. But in where God's put me in my role as a pastor, I wouldn't want my personal political leanings to stand in the way of anyone coming to grips with the gospel of Jesus Christ, whose lordship is over every party and every tribe and every tongue.

Now, honestly, that's not a very costly thing for me to give up. I don't visit CNN four times a day. It seems kind of like a small thing.

But, you know, I think along the way, as we think about this a little more deeply, I think along the way, we actually all encounter moments when giving up our rights feels hard and is hard. And it may not look as massive as Paul giving up his financial support or the Corinthians refusing to eat meat.

[31 : 26] But, you know, when I've worked a long week and it's Friday night and I just can't wait to crash and sleep in, I sort of feel like after a long work week, I have a right to a good night's sleep.

A right to a little peace and quiet. But when one of my kids wakes up crying and I need to go to them because they're sick or because they're having a bad dream and then as soon as that one falls asleep, the other one wakes up because they wet the bed or because they want to drink a water again.

I start to feel the tug in my heart of giving up what I feel is my right. I don't want to give up my right to a peaceful night.

I deserve a peaceful night. I worked hard all week and now it's being stripped away one crying kid at a time. And not wanting to let go of my rights, I get angry and I get impatient.

And instead of displaying the gospel in that moment, I display my own selfishness. I have such a right to have a right to a certain quality of life, a certain standard of living.

[32 : 54] I have such and such a profession. I make such and such a salary. Therefore, I ought to have this size house or drive this size car or wear these sorts of clothes. Now, of course, there's nothing wrong with those things in and of themselves.

But what if giving up some of those rights meant that we could invest more in kingdom work? Would we be willing to surrender some of those almost unconsciously held rights for the sake of the gospel?

Even if it meant living at a lower standard of living than many of our professional peers? And what about our right to personal independence and flexibility?

Think, for example, of caring for an elderly parent. Are we willing to give up some of our rights and to be tied down to caring for them, visiting them, calling them, possibly even taking them into our own home?

Even if it means losing a lot of our freedom, losing a lot of the flexibility and independence that we cherish so much? Even if it means that our profession might take a hit?

[34 : 11] What about our right when someone has wronged us or hurt us to pay them back? To pay them back usually through cold silence or quiet, even polite indifference.

Let's be honest. None of us are out to kill each other. But man, we can kill with our silence, can we not? Are we willing to give up even this right to get even and do the costly work of forgiveness?

You see, friends, at this level, at the heart level, forgoing our rights is much harder. That's part of the reason why Paul just doesn't lay down rules because he wants to get down deep.

And it's much harder. And that all pushes us to ask the question of how. Where do we find the motivation, the ability to actually do that?

All of us, I think, naturally want to defend our rights, but few of us have the strength to really defer them. And where that strength comes from, I think, is the third thing, the third big point that we see in our text.

[35 : 38] In the last paragraph of our text that we read, verses 15 through 18, Paul speaks of his ground for boasting. And in a parallel expression at the end of the paragraph, he speaks of his reward.

They're one and the same thing. And he explains that for him, merely preaching the gospel doesn't actually give him anything to boast about. Jesus has commanded him to preach the gospel, therefore he has to preach the gospel.

He's not doing this of his own will. It's not like he chose one day to say, oh, you know what I should do? I should give up this and preach the gospel. No, he's doing it by the will of Christ. So there's no reward for Paul in simply preaching the gospel.

Just like we wouldn't give sort of accolades to a certain kind of car because it accelerates when you push the gas pedal. That's just what cars are supposed to do. They do it by necessity. So if Paul's reward isn't just the preaching of the gospel, what is it?

That by voluntarily making no use of his rights in the gospel, he can then offer the gospel free of charge. Isn't that a beautiful phrase?

[36 : 51] Free of charge. There's the reward, Paul says. Now some have thought that Paul is speaking of a heavenly reward here, something that will come to him in the new heavens and the new earth.

But others have understood Paul to be saying that the offering of the gospel itself free of charge is the reward.

How could that be? How could the offering itself be the reward? I wonder if you've ever seen something beautiful, been really captured by it, and then wanted others to see it and experience it too.

I remember visiting an art gallery with my brother a number of years ago, and I was so excited to take him with me. He studied art in college as graphic designer, blah, blah, blah. I was so excited to take him with me because I'd been there before and there was a certain picture I really wanted him to see.

I think it was a Monet painting, like one of his 4,000 paintings of water lilies. But this one, for some reason, really struck me. I remember looking at it and thinking that the canvas almost looked like it was actually water reflecting the light of the setting sun.

[38 : 16] It was mesmerizing. And I looked at prints of it afterwards, and they just couldn't do it justice to just standing before the real thing. So I drug my brother through this gallery and into the room where it was hung, only to find that the painting had actually been loaned out to another museum.

This is the National Gallery in London. We were on the other side of the world, and guess where they were loaning it out to? Some museum in the States. It was ridiculous. I was so disappointed. Now, maybe for you, it's not a Monet painting. I get that. But maybe you've pointed out a sunset to someone as you're walking down the street. Or maybe you've hiked with a friend to a favorite waterfall.

Or maybe you've even handed your earbuds to a friend and said, you've got to listen to this. What are we hoping for in those moments? What was I hoping for in that moment just before I discovered the Monet had been shipped to a far-off museum?

I mean, at a very simple, maybe, but profound level, I was hoping that he would be able to see what I saw, to experience what I had experienced, and that somehow we'd be able then to share together in this thing of beauty.

[39 : 47] And I wasn't really wanting anything beyond that. I wasn't expecting the museum to give me a commission or a kickback on our entrance fee, because I showed it to him.

I wasn't expecting my brother to buy me lunch for showing him such a cool painting. None of that was the reward. The very act of helping him see what I saw and of getting him to see what I saw, that was the reward.

Because the thing itself was worthy of beholding. When Paul says that presenting the gospel free of charge is itself his reward, it's because in doing so, he gets to participate in a process of helping others to see, to experience what he himself saw, self-saw and experienced.

A beauty so ravishing that it changed his life forever. That there was one who was in very nature God and who possessed every right of God himself.

The right to glory and honor and freedom and strength. But who, though being equal with God, didn't exploit those rights, but gave them up and became a lowly servant and died on a cross for the sins of humanity.

[41 : 16] Friends, what is our sin? Is it not grabbing to ourselves rights that aren't rightfully ours? Putting ourself in the place of God and demanding the right to run our own lives and our own world apart from him, without him, even against him.

But friends, what is our redemption? In a beautiful reversal, Jesus Christ, the one true rightful one who has every right, empties himself of those rights. and dies our death and rises again so that all who trust in him might be forgiven and made right with God.

when Paul presents the gospel free of charge, making no use of his rights, he becomes an illustration of the gospel itself.

The good news of the grace of God that costs us nothing, but that costs Jesus everything. And friends, every time you and I are presented with an opportunity to lay down our rights for the sake of others, we are offered with the prospect of the same reward.

[42 : 42] The reward of becoming, in the very shape of our life, a display of the gospel. The reward of helping others to see and to experience in a tangible, incarnate way, the beauty of what Jesus has done for you and for me.

The thing that's grabbed us and turned us around and made our lives completely different forever. wouldn't that be a reward?

To participate in that kind of work. So friends, yes, rights are a good thing.

Something to cherish and to uphold. But don't you see that only the gospel of Jesus Christ can help us use our rights in the right way as a means of loving others and building them up and displaying the love of Christ to the world?

And may we be willing to lay down our rights to share in that great reward. Let's pray. Father, we confess that we need your Holy Spirit to take these truths and actualize them in our hearts and in our lives.

[44 : 07] God, we are so prone to defend and yet so hard-pressed to defer. Lord, I pray that you would give us wisdom for this task.

God, I pray that you would help us to see times when the giving up of our rights would not be the right thing to do. God, that we would be willing to stand up for those who are oppressed or who are wronged or who are being trampled upon.

Pray that you would give courage to those who are in relationships or situations that are abusive where their rights have been taken away. God, I pray that you would help them to see that their rights are a good thing and they are worthy of defense and worthy of standing up for.

But God, I pray that you would also help us to see those times and those moments and those relationships where we need to lay them down and bear a cost.

Lord, knowing that whatever cost we bear is nothing compared to what you bore for us and knowing that for the joy set before you, you bore the cross and that there is joy before us in following your pattern.

[45 : 25] Father, we ask this not in our own worthiness or in our own rights but in the rights of the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen.