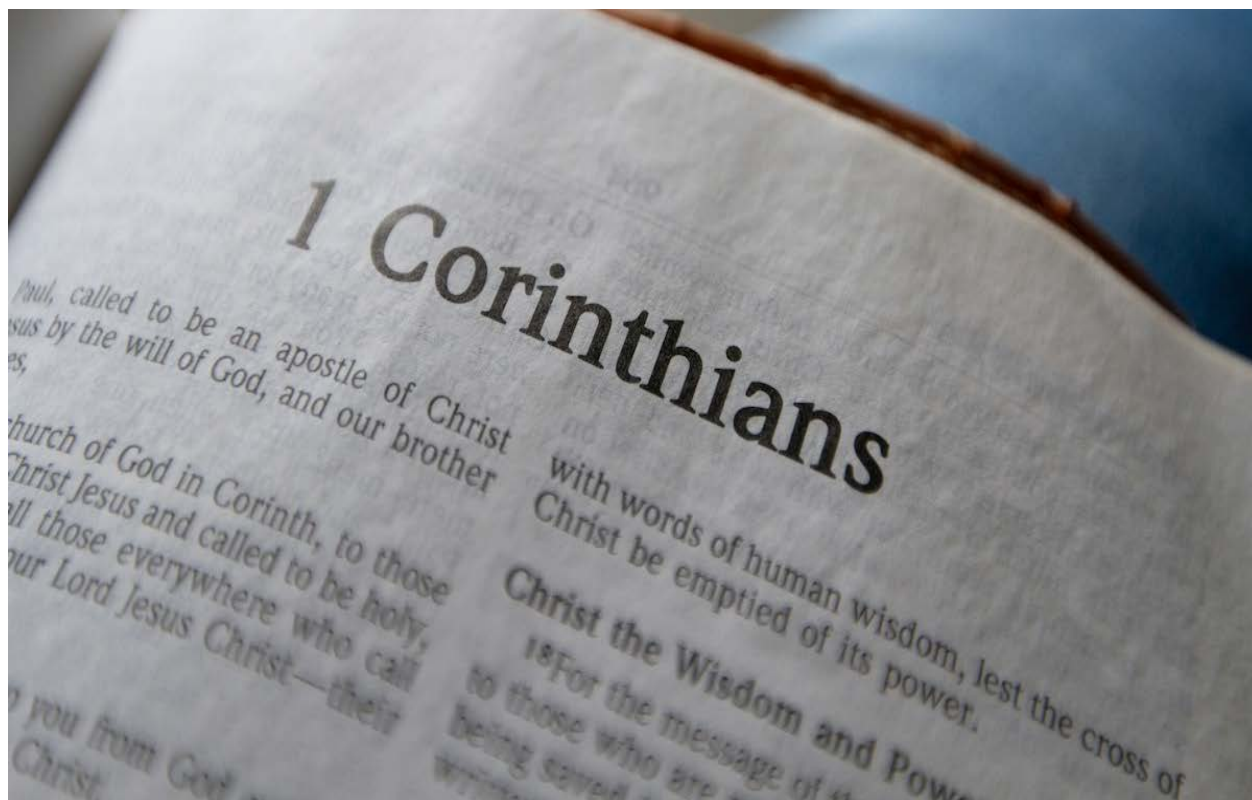


For the Gospel's Sake

1 Corinthians 9

1 and 2 Corinthians Part 10



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

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For the Gospel's Sake: 1 Corinthians 9
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 9
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Introduction to *1 Corinthians 9*

A primary theme running throughout 1 Corinthians is the importance of unity among believers.

All believers are partakers or partners together in the Gospel. The Corinthians had not learned that priority and so had become divided, contentious, quarrelsome, susceptible to false teaching, and compromised with respect to sin. By insisting that the Corinthians must put aside their differences, look to Jesus, grow in grace, and live together in mutual edification and love, Paul was trying to set them back on a course of oneness in the Lord.

And the basis of that oneness must be the Gospel, the Good News that, by His death, resurrection, ascension, and reign, Jesus has received an eternal Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Seated at the right hand of God, Jesus is bestowing that Kingdom on all who believe in Him, that they may be one as citizens and ambassadors of His realm.

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We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Proof of Calling

Pray Psalm 20.1-3.

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble;
May the name of the God of Jacob defend you;
May He send you help from the sanctuary,
And strengthen you out of Zion;
May He remember all your offerings,
And accept your burnt sacrifice.
Selab

Sing Psalm 20.1-3.

(St. Leonard's: *May the Mind of Christ, My Savior*)

Jesus, Savior, hear my pleading, set me safely, LORD, on high;
help me by Your gracious leading and receive my cry.

May You by Your Church support me; gladly, LORD, receive my praise;
may my thanks a good report be with You all my days.

Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 9.1-7.

Preparation

1. To what did Paul point as proof of his calling?
2. What issue did he raise with the Corinthians?

Meditation

Suddenly, it seems, Paul became indignant. Was he anticipating that his harangue of the Corinthians through the previous eight chapters might have chafed them a bit? Raised some hackles? Perhaps even had some of them thinking, “Who does this guy think he is?”

That seems probable to me, because Paul felt a need to remind the Corinthians that he was called of God *and used* by Him in their midst (vv. 1, 2). They were the proof of his calling, the evidence of God working through him, the divine seal of approval on his apostleship.

Yet he knew that his ministry was always being scrutinized, that some sought a reason to depart from him and his teaching to follow other—and false—teachers (v. 3). Paul turned the tables, shining the light of examination not on the veracity of his ministry but on the churlishness of those who were blessed by it (vv. 4-7). Did the Corinthians never suppose that Paul might like to have food and shelter provided while he labored in their midst (v. 4)? Did it never occur to them that he and Barnabas might have wives who needed their support (vv. 5, 6)? Were they content to let Paul pay his own way to serve them, to labor at his ministry without their contributing one drachma to his support (v. 7)?

Ouch.

Paul could prove that God had been at work in him and that he had been faithful in his calling. The Corinthians? Not so much. Paul will have more to say about this matter, but his purpose here was to arrest any grumbling about his teaching, remind them of his faithful example, and challenge them to look within themselves: Were they carrying out their calling as faithfully as he?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

“Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple

those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up" (Jn. 2.13-17).

God once used a misplaced dog's paw—aiming for a shoulder but catching a face—to release previously pent-up, righteous anger (not at the dog), and to begin to free one of our children from an abusive and hateful marital relationship. Meekness is power under control, not weakness under someone's boot. Jesus was meekness personified, and yet in righteous anger, free to drive out those who were abusing His Father's house.

Whatever tripped Paul's switch at this juncture did us all a big favor. He, like Jesus, was giving us permission to speak truth to sin. Always keeping in mind, though, that we must "not think of [ourselves] more highly than we ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Rom. 12.3).

Paul was upset about the inequity. The Corinthians were not thinking about him as a person, with needs and desires. They, through their ungenerous and disobedient behaviors, were saying to him, in so many words, "We do not value you or your teaching." They viewed him as a commodity, not a beloved teacher. The questions he asked were so pointed and heartfelt: Is it just Barnabas and me that you feel you can treat so cavalierly? Are we the only ones who must work continuously to keep ourselves afloat? Do soldiers pay to go fight? Do vineyard owners never eat of their produce? Do those that own a flock never drink the milk produced? (1 Cor. 9.4-7).

Then he felt it necessary to give his credentials (1 Cor. 9.1, 2). He did this from a heart of love and concern for those that would follow him in the work of the Kingdom. He was setting down parameters for those who would work full-time in ministry.

All Christians have a Personal Mission Field and are given work to do in the Kingdom. It is merely that some put on the hat of pastor/teacher as their employment. Just like any other job that people do, they should be paid for it.

Two things then:

Righteous indignation is not wrong.

"Indignation has taken hold of me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law" (Ps. 119.53).

Pay your pastors.

"For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages'" (1 Tim. 5.18; Deut. 25.4).

Zeal for God's work is invigorating!

"Jesus Christ...gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2.13, 14).

For reflection

1. What is righteous indignation? Why is it sometimes needed?
2. How does God intend those who minister the Word to be supported?
3. How would you be able to know if there was anything in your life that might cause God to become indignant toward you? What should you do then?

It is not new for a minister to meet with unkind returns for goodwill to a people, and diligent and successful services among them.

For the Gospel's Sake: 1 Corinthians 9

To the cavils of some, the apostle answers, so as to set forth himself as an example of self-denial, for the good of others. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9.1-14*

Pray Psalm 20.4-9.

Pray for an opportunity to “raise a banner” for Jesus today. Call on God to give you strength and to trust in Him just when you need it, so that you might be faithful to your calling.

Sing Psalm 20.4-9.

(St. Leonard's: *May the Mind of Christ, My Savior*)

Grant my every earnest longing. Let my counsel be fulfilled.

May I joyous song be strong in, living in Your will.

In Your Name we raise our banners; LORD, fulfill our every prayer!

Saved are we in glorious manner, free from every care.

Answer from Your holy heaven, save us by Your mighty hand!

Some to earthly boasts are given; in Your grace we stand.

They have bowed and fallen, Savior, while we rise and stand upright;

grant to us Your royal favor, hear us day and night.

2 Not Makin' This Up

Pray Psalm 19.7, 8.

The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple;
The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes;

Sing Psalm 19.7, 8.

(St. Christopher: *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)

The Law of God is perfect, His testimony sure;
the simple man God's wisdom learns, the soul receives its cure.
God's Word is right, and His command is pure, and truth imparts;
He makes our eyes to understand; with joy He fills our hearts.

Read 1 Corinthians 9.1-12; meditate on verses 8-12.

Preparation

1. What did Paul say about oxen?
2. What was his point in saying that?

Meditation

"I'm not makin' this up!" Paul wrote. He had just convicted the Corinthians of yet another failure of love, that they did not support him during the time he ministered the Word among them. He had to have a day job and depend on *other* believers to meet his needs.

To some hearing this letter read, that might have sounded a bit self-serving, something Paul made up. But Paul pointed to the Law of God and its teaching about allowing oxen, as they are threshing corn, to feed on the corn—to meet their needs at the expense of those for whom they worked (cf. Deut. 25.4). Paul insisted that, while this statute from the civil law was true for oxen, it is also true for those to whom any fair recompense is due (v. 10), including those who sow good Kingdom seed into the soil of believers' souls (v. 11; cf. 1 Cor. 3.5-8). The Corinthians had neglected Paul financially, and they needed to know that.

Paul chose not to invoke this right while he was working among the Corinthians (v. 12); but part of teaching people to love is pointing out any failures of love that are present in them. And it is instructive to see that Paul used the Law of God both to indict the Corinthians of their sin (cf. Rom. 7.7) and to point them to the way of love (cf. Matt. 22.34-40).

Paul used the Law analogically here, deriving a principle from this statute which derives from the eighth commandment and thus has application for us. Do not allow anyone to tell you the Law of God doesn't matter. They're just makin' that up. Paul is on solid footing when he turns to the Law of God as the ground for Christian ethics.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

As I sit here writing and passing little nibbles of what I am eating to our dogs, I know that God cares about animals. He gives us these dear creatures to love, and be loved by, and other creatures to fulfill a myriad of requirements for life and well-being. We live in Amish country, so horses are still used for transportation; and unless you are a vegetarian, cattle, sheep, pigs, and chickens supply food for us to eat.

God established His covenant with man, but He commanded that two (male and female) "of every living

thing of all flesh” be brought onto the ark and kept alive (Gen. 6.18, 19). So, when Paul quoted the passage from Deuteronomy 25.4, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain”, he was reminding us that God cares about animals, we should care about animals and their well-being, and that God cares supremely for humankind.

Thus, if animals are to be treated with care and have their needs met, even more so, people should be cared for and have their needs met. And on top of that, if someone is giving their days of work to ministering to our spiritual things, is it too much to ask that they “reap [our] material things?” (1 Cor. 9.11).

“A righteous man regards the life of his animal...” (Prov. 12.10).

“Is it oxen God is concerned about?” (1 Cor. 9.9). Yes and no.

Yes, because God created animals and He cares about all His creation.

No, because at this point Paul is not talking about animals, he is talking about himself.

And about all others who would follow in his footsteps as pastors, teachers, and theologians.

Wouldn't it be a great idea if every church group did a little math, and found what the median income was of the congregation, and then paid the pastor that? Because no doubt, many a pastor has prayed,

“Two things I request of You (deprive me not before I die):

Remove falsehood and lies far from me;

give me neither poverty nor riches—

feed me with the food allotted to me;

lest I be full and deny You, and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’

Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God” (Prov. 30.7-9).

Being a minister is not a get rich quick scheme, nor should it be a poverty platform.

It should always be like the porridge, chair, and bed that Goldilocks chose, “Just right”.

Paying a man of God properly is the right thing to do. “Not makin’ this up.”

And give your dog an extra treat.

For reflection

1. Why is Paul's use here of the Old Testament civil law so important?
2. Why would anyone think that the Old Testament Law was no longer valid and useful?
3. What can you do to improve your ability to benefit (Rom. 7.12) from the Old Testament Law?

Those who seek to do our souls good, should have food provided for them. But he renounced his right, rather than hinder his success by claiming it. It is the people's duty to maintain their minister. He may wave his right, as Paul did; but those transgress a precept of Christ, who deny or withhold due support. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on the 1 Corinthians 9.1-14

Pray Psalm 19.9-14.

Call on the Lord to guide your steps today by His Word. Let His Spirit search you, to convict you of any sins and to direct your steps in the path of the Lord in that area.

Sing Psalm 19.9-14.

(St. Christopher: *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)

The fear of God is cleansing, forever shall it last.

His judgments all are true and just, by righteousness held fast.

O seek them more than gold most fine, than honey find them sweet;

For the Gospel's Sake: 1 Corinthians 9

be warned by every word and line; be blessed with joy complete.

Who, LORD, can know his errors? O keep sin far from me!
Let evil rule not in my soul that I may blameless be.
O let my thoughts, let all my words, before Your glorious sight
be pleasing to You, gracious LORD, acceptable and right.

3 It's a Living

Pray Psalm 115.1-3.

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.
Why should the Gentiles say,
“So where *is* their God?”
But our God *is* in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.

Sing Psalm 115.1-3.

(Plainfield: *Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*)

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!
Why should the nations cry, “Where is their God on high?”
You rule us, LORD, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Read 1 Corinthians 9.1-14; meditate on verses 13, 14.

Preparation

1. To what did Paul compare himself here?
2. What did God command about those who minister His Word?

Meditation

The Law of God consists of three parts. The *Ten Commandments* are the heart and core, rather like the Constitution in our country. The *civil law* provides statutes, precepts, and rules to direct God's people more pointedly in how to apply the Commandments in their daily lives. The *religious laws* helped the people practice love for God and their neighbors in the context of worship and ceremonial life.

Paul appealed to the civil law in verses 8-12. In verses 13 and 14 he appealed to the religious laws of Israel, insisting that they, too, encode valid principles to guide us in loving well. When someone brought an offering to God, part of that was reserved for the priests who conducted the sacrifice. Paul saw in this a principle of sharing with God's servants to support his teaching that “those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (v. 14).

Preaching the Gospel is a way of making a living. In this world, living requires food, clothing, shelter, and other material goods and services. While we might wish all these to be free, in our materialist economy they are not. They must be bought and paid for with money earned by investing our energies in the time of our life in God-honoring labor. Those who benefit from that labor expect to pay for it, as we pay for what they provide us. And this should be true as well of those who benefit from the ministry of the Word.

The Lord has commanded that some should make their living by the ministry of the Word. He has also commanded that those who benefit from that ministry should support those who provide it. This is love at work within the community of faith.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Take heed to yourself that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land” (Deut. 12.19).

Paul wrote a letter to Titus, who had the unenviable assignment of putting in order the churches in Crete. This was the place concerning which one of their own prophets had written, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (Titus 1.12).

So, you can see why Paul began the letter thus, “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 1.4). ‘Cause you’re gonna need it!

All God’s people need dedicated shepherds to care for their souls.

And those dedicated shepherds should be paid for their heart, their time, and their abilities.

Paul spells out the qualifications:

1. The man must be blameless.
2. He must be the husband of one wife.
3. He must have faithful children who are not accused of dissipation or insubordination.
4. He must be a blameless steward of God’s gifts.
5. He must not be self-willed.
6. He must not be quick-tempered.
7. He must not be a heavy drinker.
8. He must not be violent.
9. He must not be greedy for money.
10. He must be hospitable.
11. He must be a lover of what is good.
12. He must be sober-minded.
13. He must be just.
14. He must be holy.
15. He must be self-controlled.
16. He must hold fast the faithful Word of God, as taught.
17. He must be able to exhort his listeners through sound doctrine.
18. He must, in sound doctrine, be able to convict those who contradict the Word of God. (Titus 1.6-9)

When you find that man, be ever-so thankful for him, and for goodness’ sake, pay him!

For reflection

1. Do you think people sometimes take their ministers for granted? Explain. Do you pray for your pastor, that he might continue to grow in the qualifications for a shepherd?
2. In some people’s minds, ministers should receive the bare minimum salary for their work. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. How is supporting those who minister the Word a way of loving God and our neighbors?

Again he makes use of a new comparison, to prove that he had not used the power that he had from the Lord. Nor does he any longer borrow examples from any other source, but shows that this has been appointed by the Lord — that the Churches should provide for the support of their ministers. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9.13, 14

Pray Psalm 115.9-18.

Pray and give thanks for those who minister God’s Word to you. Pray that God will supply all their needs and use their work to glorify His Name.

Sing Psalm 115.9-18.

(Plainfield: *Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*)

All who trust in Jesus yield—ever to His Name be glory—

For the Gospel's Sake: 1 Corinthians 9

find in Him their help and shield: Ever to Your Name be glory!
O Israel, trust the LORD! He helps us evermore!
Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious LORD—ever to Your Name be glory—
will attend us evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless all who fear You, LORD, all who obey Your Word,
all who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase—ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless us with eternal peace: Ever to Your Name be glory!
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore
and bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

4 Necessity and Reward

Pray Psalm 96.5-7.

For all the gods of the peoples *are* idols,
But the LORD made the heavens.
Honor and majesty *are* before Him;
Strength and beauty *are* in His sanctuary.
Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
Give to the LORD glory and strength.

Sing Psalm 96.5-7.

(Mit Freuden Zart: *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)

All other gods are idols vain; the LORD created heaven.
Splendor and strength with Him obtain; to Him be glory given!
All fam'lies, praise this mighty LORD! Give strength and glory to His Word;
exalt the LORD of heaven!

Read 1 Corinthians 9.1-18; meditate on verses 15-18.

Preparation

1. What commitment did Paul make concerning his ministry?
2. Why did Paul accept this ministry?

Meditation

Paul was not chiding the Corinthians about their neglect of his needs during his ministry among them so that they would send him “back pay” (v. 15). He wrote to edify them and direct them in the ways of love.

Paul did not ask people to support him. God had called him to this ministry, and Paul was confident that He would provide for all his needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4.19). He would boast in what the Lord had done through his ministry, not in any people who might think they could take credit for it because they supported it. Fulfilling his calling was his only necessity, not fretting about his daily bread (v. 16).

By taking up his calling in faith and obedience, Paul believed that God would reward him as He saw fit (v. 17). He was content with that. But he was not content for those he had led to the Lord and served so faithfully to fail in the duties of love. Paul freely preached the Gospel to them while he was in Corinth, and he freely wrote the Gospel to them in these epistles (v. 18). Fulfilling his calling, without fussing about remuneration, was rewarding enough for Paul.

Paul teaches us that what matters each day is what God has called us to do. Once we have discerned that, we must press on, trusting that He will meet our needs and give us reason to boast in Him when our work is done. Our reward, at the end of the day, will be to realize that God Who called us has been faithful in helping us do that which brings honor and glory to Him.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9.16).

“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’” (Lk. 17.10).

For the Gospel's Sake: 1 Corinthians 9

Paul and Jesus had the same take on our Kingdom work. Called to it, we must do it; and the reward is in obedience. For when we obey God, we please Him. And when we please Him, we have fulfilled the Law, and we experience the joy of the Lord.

The basics of love are that we care for our fellowman. And that we pay them what they are due: “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,’ when you have it with you” (Prov. 3.27,28).

Our attitude about our own work should be Paul’s.
And our attitude towards one another should be God’s.

We do our work gladly because the necessity of it has been emblazoned on our hearts and in our minds. And we show love to our neighbor because we read, meditate on, and pray into our hearts and minds the Scripture that teaches us to “Keep the Law and love our neighbor as ourselves” (Matt. 22.37-41).

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (Jn. 13.1). “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2.5, 8).

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4.16) ...casting all our cares upon Him because He cares deeply for us (1 Pet. 5.7). God will take care of us. He knows what we need, even before we ask Him (Matt. 6.8). He, and others, care for us. He, and we, must care for them. After all, “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

We only need cry out, “Woe is me” if we do not fulfill our requirements to others.
“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6.2).
Now that’s a necessity!

For reflection

1. How does Paul use the ideas of “necessity” and “reward” with respect to our callings?
2. Do you see your calling as a “necessity”? Do you experience fulfilling your calling as a “reward”?
3. Fulfilling a calling is driven by love for God and neighbors. Explain.

...he says that a curse was ready to fall upon him, if he did not preach the gospel. Why? Because he has been called to it, and therefore is constrained by necessity. Come to the Father, and through whom the Father sends all blessings to us, by the influence and working of the Holy Spirit. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9.16*

Pray Psalm 96.1-4, 11-13.

Thank God for your calling, for what He has called you to do in serving Him. Recommit yourself to all the work He has appointed to you, and thank Him that He will supply all you need to serve Him faithfully each day.

Sing Psalm 96.1-4, 11-13.

(Mit Freuden Zart: *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)

Sing to the LORD! O, bless His Name! All nations tell His glory!
Salvation’s tidings loud proclaim; let earth rehearse His story!
For God is greatly to be praised; His throne above all gods is raised!
Fear Him and sing His glory!

For the Gospel's Sake: 1 Corinthians 9

Let heaven sing with lusty voice; let earth and sea sing sweetly!
Let fields and trees in Him rejoice, for He is coming swiftly
to judge the world in righteousness, the peoples in His faithfulness.
He comes; exalt Him greatly!

5 For the Gospel's Sake

Pray Psalm 52.8, 9.

But I *am* like a green olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.
I will praise You forever,
Because You have done it;
And in the presence of Your saints
I will wait on Your name, for *it is* good.

Sing Psalm 52.8, 9.

(Warrington: *Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!
Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

Read 1 Corinthians 9.1-23; meditate on verses 19-23.

Preparation

1. What did Paul make himself to others?
2. Why did he do that?

Meditation

The operative phrase in this passage is “for the gospel’s sake” (v. 23). We will miss Paul’s message—or misinterpret it—if we lose sight of this phrase. His use of “all things” and “all means” is bounded by “for the gospel’s sake”. He would do nothing unlawful or scandalous or petty or merely manipulative. Paul’s desire in all his behavior was that he might be a “partaker” of the Gospel with other believers (v. 22), especially (in this instance) the Corinthians. To be a partaker of the Gospel—to fellowship with the Gospel—is to have the Gospel of the Kingdom define and shape everything you do or say.

What was he willing to do to accomplish that goal? In short, whatever he lawfully could. He would get a day job to support himself. He would speak the language of the Old Testament (v. 20) or of Greek philosophy (v. 21; cf. Acts 17). He would suffer want, hardship, persecution, imprisonment, and more, if doing so would make it possible for him to preach and teach the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom.

Indeed, it was precisely because Paul knew the fellowship of the Gospel that he could make himself a servant to all men, whatever it took, to bring them to Jesus as well (v. 19). He knew the beauty and glory of seeing Jesus with the eyes of his heart. He experienced the Presence of the Lord for comfort, encouragement, strength amid weakness, and rest amid labor. He rejoiced in others coming to faith and taking their place in the journey of Kingdom life. And above all, he thrilled to see God being glorified by His people.

Paul was free from dependence on men (v. 19), free in the Lord Jesus to trust and obey Him alone. And this made him a most effective, persistent, faithful, and joyful servant of all people. Even, yes, the Corinthians.

Even you and me.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Life experiences. Each of us has them and they are uniquely our own.
It is why we are in the Personal Mission Field that God has put us in.

Paul was able to be those things “for the gospel’s sake” because that was who he was. It is one of the main reasons he told the Corinthians that, “each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that” (1 Cor. 7.7). “As the Lord has called each one, so let him walk,” and “Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called” (1 Cor. 7.17, 20). It only makes sense.

The things we have suffered and come through with God’s help, we can use to minister to others: “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thess. 5.11). “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1.3, 4).

Our childhoods, our growing-up years, our marital joys and challenges, our troubles and joys raising children, or our singleness, our jobs, our health and lack of the same, our physical pains and disabilities, our mental and emotional struggles, our testimonies of redemption, all these things and many others are what make us who we are in Christ. Paul shared some of his: “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4.11-13).

David penned a Psalm about the goodness of the LORD after he had (as the superscription for Psalm 34 states) pretended madness before Abimelech. David wasn’t mad, but by observing Saul in his madness, learned how to feign madness to save himself from an enemy. It was a learned life experience used in his Personal Mission Field; and this written about experience benefited millions who would eventually read his words.

All of what we know and have experienced, as painful as much of it is, can be used for God’s glory and “for the gospel’s sake”. It is a grab bag of information that, instead of being ignored or suppressed, can be reclaimed through God’s goodness and grace for His use. For we know and do believe that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...” (Rom. 8.28, 29).

We can reclaim, repurpose, and reuse all our life experiences, tempered with God’s grace—for the gospel’s sake.

For reflection

1. What does the phrase, “for the gospel’s sake”, mean to you?
2. Do you have fellowship in the Gospel with other Christians? Is that fellowship as full and transforming as it could be?
3. Whom will you encourage today in the fellowship of the Gospel? How will you do that?

Though he would transgress no laws of Christ, to please any man, yet he would accommodate himself to all men, where he might do it lawfully, to gain some. Doing good was the study and business of his life... Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9.15-23

Pray Psalm 52.1-7.

Pray for the lost and for all those who oppose the truth that is in Jesus. Pray that God will use you as a light to draw others into the fellowship of the Gospel.

Sing Psalm 52.1-7.

(Warrington: *Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.
They utter words both harsh and strong with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

God will forever break them down, uproot, and cast them to the ground!
He from their safety tears them away, no more to know the light of day.

The righteous see and laugh and fear, and say, "Behold, what have we here?
Such are all who at God conspire, and wealth and evil ways desire."

6 It Takes Discipline

Pray Psalm 32.1, 2.

Blessed *is he whose* transgression *is* forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.
Blessed *is* the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit *there is* no deceit.

Sing Psalm 32.1, 2.

(Hendon: *Take My Life and Let It Be*)

Blessed are they whose sins the LORD has forgiven by His Word!
Pure their spirits are within; them He charges with no sin;
them He charges with no sin!

Read 1 Corinthians 9.1-27; meditate on verses 24-27.

Prepare

1. To what did Paul compare the Christian life?
2. What does this require as far as our bodies are concerned?

Meditation

The idea of having to “discipline” our bodies sounds perhaps not very appealing.

But there is no way around it. Paul says we’re in a race, and our goal is to win the prize (v. 24). What prize? The prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus—to be like Jesus, to know true and continuous fellowship with Him, and to realize increasingly the imperishable crown of everlasting life (vv. 24, 25; cf. Phil. 3.12-15; Heb. 12.1, 2).

Though we are saved and forgiven, the law of sin still operates in us (Rom. 7.21-23). The only way to keep it in check is to improve in all areas of our soul—heart, mind, and conscience—and to bring our bodies into conformity to the way of Jesus, which is the Law of God (1 Jn. 2.1-6).

It’s strange to think, but the shaping of our soul begins with the disciplining of our body. For unless we cause our body to come to the Word each day, set aside time to pray and meditate on Jesus, and sit still and listen for the voice of His Spirit (Ps. 139.23, 24), our soul will not have access to the resources it needs to be transformed into the image of Jesus. Conversely, as our soul is transformed, our body will follow its lead into the good works God has prepared for us from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 2.10).

The Corinthians needed to understand that loving and edifying one another doesn’t just happen. It requires discipline. They must commit their bodies to the Gospel and to all that is required to break out of their spiritual infancy. Then they must keep up the disciplines of grace for every moment of their lives. The prize is certainly worth the effort.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

Good news. There is absolutely no law against “self-control” (Gal. 5.23).
We are free to rein in our wills for obedience to Christ any time we choose.

Paul gives a helpful hint by sharing the word temperate. He suggests that those of us who are competing for this prize of bearing the characteristics of Jesus Christ be temperate in all things. Adjectivally this conveys that we be moderate or self-restrained as regards indulgence of appetite or passion; calm, and reasonable. Synonyms for temperate are: being agreeable, levelheaded, pleasant, sober, checked, even-tempered, sensible,

stable, and not excessive.

And Paul stressed the undesirability of hypocrisy. “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9.27). When our mouths and our behavior don’t match up, it is never a good look.

And we strive in this manner for the prize “not with uncertainty” and not futilely (1 Cor. 9.26) but in the knowledge of the promises of God.

“The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand...

For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good...

IF you obey the voice of the LORD your God,

to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and

IF you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off” (Deut. 30.9-11).

God never makes it too difficult for us to understand or for us to do.

He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13.5), and He has given us His Spirit to strengthen and guide us for the work and the commandments He has given us to follow (Jn. 14.16, 17).

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I AM holy’” (1 Pet. 1.13-16).

It’ll take discipline—but “the prize is certainly worth the effort.”

For reflection

1. How do you discipline your body for the sake of the Gospel?
2. What benefits do you experience from such discipline?
3. Whom will you encourage today in the disciplines of the Lord?

The body must not be suffered to rule. The apostle presses this advice on the Corinthians. He sets before himself and them the danger of yielding to fleshly desires, pampering the body, and its lusts and appetites. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9.24-27

Pray Psalm 32.3-11.

Pray for a more disciplined life, that God will show you how to train your body and soul to gain His great reward.

Sing Psalm 32.3-11.

(Hendon: *Take My Life and Let It Be*)

When in silence I remained, groaning in my sinful pain,

You Your hand upon me lay; all my strength You drained away,

all my strength You drained away.

I confessed my sin to You; You forgave me, ever true!

Let confession’s pleading sound reach You while You may be found,

reach You while You may be found!

For the Gospel's Sake: 1 Corinthians 9

When flood waters threaten me, You my hiding place will be.
O'er them I will rise above, buoyed by Your redeeming love,
buoyed by Your redeeming love.

Teach me, LORD, how I should live; sound instruction ever give.
Let me never stubborn be; let Your eye watch over me,
let Your eye watch over me.

Though the wicked wail and weep, they rejoice whose souls You keep.
Trusting, we exult with praise, joyfully singing all our days,
joyfully singing all our days!

7 Partners in the Gospel

Pray Psalm 133.1, 3.

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
...*It is* like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.

Sing Psalm 133.1, 3.

(Tryggare Kan Ingen Vara: *Children of the Heavenly Father*)

O behold, how sweet, how pleasant, when the brethren dwell together;
all in unity abiding find God's blessing there presiding.

Review 1 Corinthians 9.1-27; meditate on verse 23.

Preparation

1. What did Paul want to partake of?
2. What did he want for the Corinthians?

Meditation

A primary theme running throughout 1 Corinthians is the importance of unity among believers. All believers are partakers or partners together in the Gospel. The Corinthians had not learned that priority and so had become divided, contentious, quarrelsome, susceptible to false teaching, and compromised with respect to sin. By insisting that the Corinthians must put aside their differences, look to Jesus, grow in grace, and live together in mutual edification and love, Paul was trying to set them back on a course of oneness in the Lord.

And the basis of that oneness must be the Gospel, the Good News that, by His death, resurrection, ascension, and reign, Jesus has received an eternal Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Seated at the right hand of God, Jesus is bestowing that Kingdom on all who believe in Him, that they may be one as citizens and ambassadors of His realm. The Corinthians must in all things seek the furtherance of the Gospel, both among themselves as a body of believers and in the surrounding world.

As partakers together in the Gospel the Corinthians needed to rediscover its benefits—forgiveness, new life in Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the mind of Christ, a calling to serve Him. Basking in the glory of the Gospel's benefits they would gladly take up its obligations—to serve Jesus, love and edify one another, maintain purity within the Body of Christ, and bear powerful witness to the world. Thus they would rejoice in the hope of the Gospel, that soon Jesus, Who is even now preparing a place for us, would come again to take them unto Himself forever.

As partakers together in the Gospel, our focus and concern must always be to live out that Good News, individually and as congregations, keeping our eye on the prize of Jesus and serving Him and one another in all we do.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“I try to find common ground...

so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him.

I do this to get the Gospel to them and also for the blessing I myself receive when I see them come to Christ” (1 Cor. 9.22, 23 TLB).

We are not only partners in the Gospel with Paul and with other believers, but we are also fellow workers with God (1 Cor. 3.9). And this is good and acceptable in His sight because He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2.3, 4).

Moses, the man of God, took his partnership with God, and his responsibilities and concern for those in his Personal Mission Field, very seriously. He was honest with the Israelites about their condition: “You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you” (Deut. 9.24). But Moses’ response to this truth? “Thus I prostrated myself before the LORD; forty days and forty nights I kept prostrating myself, because the LORD had said He would destroy you. Therefore I prayed to the LORD, and said: ‘O Lord GOD, do not destroy Your people and Your inheritance whom You have redeemed through Your greatness, whom You have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not look on the stubbornness of this people, or on their wickedness or their sin...’” (Deut. 9.25-27).

“For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (Ps. 86.5).

We have been redeemed through God’s forgiveness, mercy, and grace, and now we want others to know and experience this same wonder: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5.8).

We are also charged with the responsibility to “Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter” (Prov. 24.11)—those brothers and sisters in Christ who are not living according to God’s law—like the Corinthians Paul was writing to (1 Cor. 5.1-13).

The good news, in conjunction with the Gospel Good News, is this glorious life that we have been called to now, and the further joy of moving into our eternal heavenly home in the future.

Jesus promises His people: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn. 14.2, 3).

And He also promises that now, in the present: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (Jn. 14.23). “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13.5; Deut. 31.6).

He will not leave us as orphans (Jn. 14.18) but will send us the Helper, the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14.26).

Partners with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
And Partners in the Gospel with not only the Triune God, but with all those who love and serve Him faithfully. What a blessed and great work we have been called to!

For reflection

1. How would you explain the benefits of the Gospel to an unsaved friend? Why should he want to be saved?
2. How can believers encourage one another in the hope we have in the Gospel?
3. What will you do today as part of your work in the Gospel?

Persons who share in [the blessings of] the gospel are those who cooperate in the salvation of those who hear. For the gospel is the power of God for salvation. They are the instruments through which God declares his power for delivering men and women. Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9.23

For the Gospel's Sake: 1 Corinthians 9

Pray Psalm 133.2, 3.

Pray that God will enrich fellowship in the Gospel among the members of your church, and among all the churches in your community.

Sing Psalm 133.2, 3.

(Tryggare Kan Ingen Vara: *Children of the Heavenly Father*)

Like the precious oil of blessing flowing down on Aaron's vestment,
God's anointing rests forever where His people dwell together.

Like the dew of Hermon's fountain falling down on Zion's mountain,
so the blessing of the Savior dwells where unity finds favor.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What is the Gospel? How would you explain the Gospel to a friend who asked? What does it mean to live for the sake of the Gospel?
2. Paul appealed to the Law of God in this chapter. How much does the Law of God shape and guide your walk with and work for the Lord?
3. Paul understood that God wanted to save lost souls through him. Do you pray that God will use you to save lost folks? Besides prayer, what else will that involve on your part?
4. What is your role in promoting “Gospel partnership” in your church?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

For prayer:

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