

I Came Here to Win

1 Corinthians: Rejecting Chaos and Embracing Christ / 1 Corinthians 9:19–27

- Go ahead and open your Bibles to [1 Corinthians 9](#).
- How many of you like cooking contest shows?
- In our family, we like to watch Guy's Grocery Games and all the different iterations of the "Baking Championship" shows.
- You know what the most repeated line seems to be?
- "I came here to win."
- You don't go on a game show with the intention of losing...you go there to win the \$25,000 dollars.
- What does that have to do with our passage today?
- Paul is going to challenge us to live our lives like we came here to win.
- Before you think I have lost it, realize that this isn't going to play out like you might think.

- Let's set the stage.
- We have been studying 1 Corinthians for a while now.
- This is a letter that Paul wrote to a group of Christians who thought they had everything figured out.
- They were proud, divided, and the church was full of problems.
- Paul started the letter by addressing their divisions and then moved on to talk about specific areas of sin where the church had things wrong.
- From there, he has shifted to talking about how we handle our rights as believers.
- Paul began talking in **chapter 8** about the need to surrender our own rights at times in order not to damage the faith of less mature believers.
- Last week, in the beginning of **chapter 9**, Paul talked about how he laid down his rights to partake in whatever food or drink he wanted, to have a wife, and to make a living from preaching the gospel.

- He used that last point as a major illustration. Everything from normal life through Old Testament commands through Jesus's own teaching said it that people who preach the gospel should be compensated for their work.
- Despite how obvious it was that it would have been fine to get paid, Paul willingly surrendered his rights so no one could question his motives or his actions and then reject his message.
- The life principle we took from last week was that we should:

Joyfully embrace the goal of building others up.

- In the passage we are looking at today, Paul is going to drive this message home by focusing on a specific way we build up others.
- As Christians who are saved by God, secure in Christ, and citizens of the kingdom Jesus will one day set up over the entire world, we are called to lay down our rights so that other people can learn about Jesus.
- While Paul is going to talk about himself a fair amount in this passage, what he says applies to everyone who claims to follow Jesus.
- I recognize today that the overwhelming majority of the people in this room are not going to serve vocationally in ministry.
- In other words, you are going to have a job in the marketplace or in your home, doing good, honest work for the Lord wherever he puts you.
- Can I challenge you, though, to recognize that if you are a Christian, you are called to point the world around you to Christ?
- Let's look at [1 Corinthians 9:19-27](#) together this morning.
- We are going to break the passage into two main sections this morning.
- If you and I come here to win, what do we need to do?
- The first part is in **verses 19-23**.
- **We can summarize Paul's teaching in this section like this:**

1) Surrender your rights so people can be saved.

- Pick up in **verse 19** again.
- The first part of the verse is a theme we have seen multiple times in our study of 1 Corinthians: While Paul loved the people of Corinth, he recognized that they were not in charge of him.

- If you go back to **chapter 4**, you find Paul acknowledging that the Corinthians did not have any real rights over him. He wasn't bound by their opinions of him or what they wanted him to do; he belonged to the Lord and the Lord alone.
- In fact, he had just said that those who are called by Christ are his slaves:

1 Corinthians 7:23 CSB

You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of people.

- You are the Lord's!
- Back in **9:19**, though, look at what he goes on to say...
- "I am free, but I have made myself a slave to everyone."
- Why? Why on earth would he do that?
- "In order to win more people."
- Jump down to **verse 22**. After giving several examples of what he is talking about, Paul summarizes his aim by saying this...
- "I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some."
- Paul was willing to surrender his own rights so he would be able to share the gospel and see people come to faith in Christ.
- Let's talk for a minute about what Paul isn't saying.
- Paul isn't talking about becoming a people-pleaser so everyone will be happy with you and like you and never get mad at you.
- He isn't telling us that we should simply go along with the crowd and try to blend in and not make any waves.
- Willingly surrendering our rights as believers doesn't mean we are going to disappear into the crowd; in fact, it may mean the exact opposite.
- Even more importantly than that, Paul isn't saying that he will compromise the truth to fit in or make his message more accommodating.
- Paul was not willing to compromise the message of the gospel so people wouldn't get mad.

- If you question that, read through the book of Acts. See how many times he gets laughed or tossed out of town because he proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah and as one who was raised from the dead.
- The message of the gospel of the gospel is offensive.
- Paul already addressed that in this letter:

1 Corinthians 1:22–24 CSB

For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom,

but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.

Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God,

- The message of the gospel was foolishness to some and an insurmountable hurdle for others, but he would not change his message to make it easier for people to swallow.
- In surrendering his rights, Paul never endorsed sin, stopped proclaiming the truth, or compromised in any way.
- So, what is Paul saying we should do?
- We must be willing to make intentional adjustments in the way we live our lives so that people can know Jesus.
- He deals with that in **verse 20-22a**.
- Let's talk briefly about the groups he mentions here:
 - It might help to use everyone's favorite breakfast food as an example: bacon.
 - To be clear, the Bible never tells us whether or not Paul ever ate bacon. However, we can use this as an illustration of the principle he is outlining here.
 - Jewish dietary law said that pigs were unclean and therefore it was wrong to eat bacon.
 - In [Mark 7:19](#), Jesus declared all foods clean. He reaffirmed that to Peter through a series of visions in [Acts 10](#).
 - So, when Paul was hanging out with Jews he was trying to win to Christ, he wouldn't eat bacon.
 - This is building off what he said in **chapter 8**—it would have been fine to eat the bacon, but he abstained because it was more important to be able to tell someone about Jesus than it was to have a good strip of bacon.

- Paul said in **verse 20** that he was no longer under the Old Testament Law—he didn't have to observe that.
- However, he chose to because he wanted to remove barriers from people coming to Jesus.
- Now, if he was with the Gentiles, people who didn't observe God's Old Testament Law, they might offer Paul bacon at a meal. If they did, he would willingly eat the bacon so as not to offend his hosts and lose the ability to share the gospel with him.
- That's what he is getting at in **verse 21**.
- Notice that he uses an artful play on words here.
- Paul just said he wasn't under the Law of God, but now he says he is under the law of Christ.
- This is where we see Paul making clear that he wasn't going to compromise on what was right and wrong.
- He may not be under the capital L "Law" anymore, but he is still subject to the law of Christ that requires him to live a holy life honoring Jesus.
- If his Gentile host asked him to do something that violated God's moral commands, he wasn't going to do that.
- However, if it wasn't a moral issue, Paul was willing to adjust however he needed to in order to earn a hearing for the gospel.
- The fact Paul has to go to such great lengths to defend this tells us that the church at Corinth seemed to think he was wishy-washy or two-faced.
- That isn't what Paul is saying at all.
- He isn't saying to the Jews, "Oh, you are right...we should still observe the Law" and then telling the Gentiles, "Just kidding; it's not that big a deal."
- That would be wrong.
- Instead, he is intentionally adjusting his life so that others may hear about Jesus.
- Go back again to **verse 22**...
- His driving aim was that people would hear the gospel and come to know and love Jesus.
- He knew that not everyone would follow Jesus, but he made it his life's goal that, whatever, it cost him personally, Paul would share Jesus with as many people as the Lord allowed.

- I know that most of us in this room are not in vocational ministry, but all of us need to ask ourselves a few questions:
 - When was the last time I adjusted my life to help someone know Jesus?
 - Am I willing to put aside my rights so that someone else can know Jesus?
- If you can't think of anything, start praying for someone you know who doesn't know Jesus.
- Then, start watching for opportunities to give up some time or some comfort so they can know him.
- Look back at **verse 23**...
- Paul sacrificed his rights and put himself in challenging situations so he could share in the blessings of the gospel.
- He had been saved by Jesus, and now he wanted to share in the blessings that come through seeing God draw people to himself through Paul's ministry.
- He surrendered his rights so he could share in the blessings.
- "Sean, all that sounds kinda hard."
- It is hard to surrender my rights so others can know Jesus.
- Here's the question...did you come here to win?
- **That's what Paul challenges us with in the second part of this passage...**

2) Discipline yourself.

- In **verse 24-27**, Paul issues a stern warning.
- He draws from the imagery of the Olympic Games and the Isthmian Games held near Corinth and paints a powerful picture.
- Look at what he says...
- **Paul's challenge here is two-fold:**

A) Discipline yourself to win.

- Our aim as believers shouldn't be simply to exist or drift through life.
- Instead, our goal as Christians should be to live in such a way that we will win!
- What are we winning?

- If you remember back in **chapter 3**, Paul told us that as believers, there will be a time when our works are tried with fire and what doesn't burn up will be a reward for us.
- Paul is challenging the church at Corinth to run toward that prize—the reward Jesus offers his faithful servants.
- Be careful: We are not talking here about winning or losing our salvation.
- Remember what Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus about that:

Ephesians 2:8–10 CSB

For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—
not from works, so that no one can boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

- Your salvation is a gift that is won for you and given to you by grace through faith in Jesus.
- You didn't win that; Jesus won it for you.
- If you have been saved, though, there should be a desire in you to honor Jesus in every aspect of your life in a growing way.
- If there isn't, something is deeply wrong and you may not have a genuine relationship with Jesus.
- Let this passage serve as a warning for you to make sure that you have genuinely surrendered to Jesus as Lord.
- If you are here, though, you should seek to discipline yourself to live a godly life so you can win the crown.
- In **verse 25**, Paul points out that the competitors in the games did all of this for fleeting recognition and a wreath that would wilt.
 - The olympics are about to begin in a month or so. Who can tell me who won the gold medal in the Men's 100m Dash in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics? (Marcell Jacobs of Italy)
 - That man trained for years only to be completely forgotten.
- You and I, as we run the race Christ sets before us, are running to receive a reward we will enjoy for all eternity.
- That should lead us to, as Paul says, exercise self-control in everything.
- We aren't talking about Jocko Willink or David Goggins kind of neo-Stoicism.

- We are talking about disciplining ourselves for godliness, which in the immediate context, includes joyfully surrendering our rights so lost people can know Jesus and saved people can grow in him.
- What areas of your life right now are suffering from a lack of discipline? Where are you ignoring sin and not seeking to discipline your body and, as Paul says in **verse 27**, bring it under strict control?
- Run like you came here to win!
- If you are going to win, though, you can't cheat.
- **That's why draw one final exhortation from this passage:**

B) Discipline yourself to avoid disqualification.

- Go back and reread **verses 26-27**.
- Run in such a way that you won't be disqualified.
- Has anyone ever heard of Esteban Prado?
- I doubt it. He is a runner who ran in the Orange County marathon back in May. Reports say he is fairly new to marathon running.
- He led the majority of the 26.2 mile race and crossed the finish line first but was ultimately disqualified.
- Without knowing the rules, he accepted a drink of water from his dad who was watching the race that day.
- It is against the rules to receive water from a spectator, so even after beating 3,500 other people, Esteban was disqualified. [1]
- How disheartening is that? All the time, training, and energy gone because he didn't compete according to the rules.
- The same can happen to us!
- Again, Paul is not saying that we can lose our salvation.
- He is saying, however, that we can lose our reward.
- This is especially true of those of us serving vocationally in ministry. If I were to give myself to certain sins, I would be disqualified from serving on staff here at Northstar, and rightfully so.

- I would no longer be able to be used of God the same way I had been, and it would impact my reward.
- You may not be in vocational ministry today, but if you are serving Christ, you are still serving for a reward.
- Your sin can impact your ability to share the gospel and serve in different ways.
- Run like you came to win. Discipline your body, enslave it, surrender your rights, and see Jesus save people and change lives around you.
- After all, he is the one we are patterning our lives after.
- Jesus is fully God, and yet he surrendered his rights when he took on flesh and died in our place.
- He disciplined himself, submitting to the Father's will, and going to the cross for us.
- The writer of Hebrews sums it up this way:

Hebrews 12:1–2 CSB

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us,

keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Run to win. Surrender your rights, discipline your bodies, and see God change hearts.

Endnotes:

[1] <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/sports/runner-disqualified-winner-oc-marathon-water/3405692/>