

SERVING THE GOSPEL THROUGH FREEDOM AND LOVE

Series: First Corinthians

Primary Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 (ESV)

Primary Scripture Reading

“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.” — 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 (ESV)

Introduction

This message explores one of the central tensions of the Christian life: the relationship between Christian freedom and Christian love. The Apostle Paul teaches that believers truly are free in Christ. However, that freedom is not meant to make us self-centered; rather, it empowers us to serve others for the sake of the gospel.

Pastor Emmanuel explains that mature believers do not merely ask, “What am I allowed to do?” Instead they ask a deeper and more gospel-centered question: “What best serves the gospel?”

1. Free in Christ, Yet Not Self-Focused

Paul begins by declaring that although he is free from everyone, he voluntarily becomes a servant to everyone so that more people might come to Christ. Christian freedom is not permission to place ourselves at the center of our lives. Instead, it gives us the ability to serve others with humility.

The world defines freedom as doing whatever we want. But the gospel shows a different model. Jesus Himself had every right of heaven, yet He laid those rights down to save humanity.

In the same way, Paul willingly laid aside certain rights as an apostle when insisting on them might create barriers to people hearing the gospel.

Reflection Question: How might God be asking you to hold your personal rights more loosely?

2. Flexible in Approach, Faithful in Truth

Paul explains that he became “as a Jew” to reach Jews and “as one outside the law” to reach Gentiles. This does not mean he compromised the truth of the gospel. Instead, he adjusted his approach so that unnecessary barriers would not prevent people from hearing about Jesus.

The message of the gospel never changes, but our methods may adapt. Mature believers learn to remove cultural or personal obstacles that might distract people from the central message of Christ.

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Flexibility in ministry is not weakness. It is wisdom. Paul models a posture that is approachable without compromise and compassionate without abandoning truth.

Reflection Question: Are there cultural or personal preferences that may be creating unnecessary barriers for others?

3. Focused on the Mission of the Gospel

Paul repeatedly states his motivation: everything he does is for the sake of the gospel. His goal is not personal comfort, reputation, or preference—his goal is that people would come to know Jesus Christ.

This passage challenges believers to examine their own lives. Sometimes we are not committing obvious sin, yet we may be clinging so tightly to our preferences that we unintentionally become obstacles to the gospel.

When the mission of Christ becomes our primary focus, we learn to hold our freedoms with humility and our preferences with open hands.

Reflection Question: Is anything in your life becoming a barrier rather than a bridge to the gospel?

Closing Reflection

Jesus is the ultimate example behind this passage. Though He possessed all the glory and rights of heaven, He willingly laid them aside to come near to us. He lived the life we could not live, died the death we deserved, and rose again in victory.

Paul's life reflects the same pattern—the shape of the cross. As followers of Christ, we are called to live in that same way: holding our freedoms with maturity, our preferences with humility, and the gospel with unwavering conviction.

When we do this, our lives become bridges that help others encounter the grace of Jesus.