

**7/20/25 Giving Up to Gain
1 Corinthians 9:15-27**

Thank you for all the kind words and gifts for my 25th anniversary of serving here as pastor. Both Paula and I are extremely blessed by God's grace and your encouragement. It is truly a joy to be on this journey with you of knowing Christ and making Him known.

If you are new here, we always tell our guests three things...

In our study of 1 Corinthians, we have seen that chapters 8-9 deal primarily with the right and wrong use of Christian liberty. Steven Schouten taught the first 14 verses of chapter 9 last week where Paul had the right to receive financial support, but being a mature Christian, he balanced his authority with discipline. He did not have the right to give up his liberty in Christ, but he did have the liberty to give up his rights. He was willing to give up the right to financial support so as not to hinder the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul is talking about priorities, the things that are really important to us in our lives. The Apostle Paul was concerned about people who have not heard the gospel. He told the Corinthians that he was so concerned that he was determined to build bridges rather than walls, to give up personal rights rather than be a stumbling block to another, and he would even suffer personally if that is what was necessary to bring the message of hope to people.

That there is "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5). Acts 4:12 says "There is 'no other name under Heaven by which we must be saved.'" And we must make people aware that Jesus is the "way the truth, and the life and no one can come to the Father except through Him." (John 14:6). 1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

The Bible teaches that people who do not turn to Christ for salvation and new life will spend eternity in hell.

This is what the Bible teaches. We have a responsibility to share this good news of forgiveness and new life with as many people as possible.

We know this in our heads. We say this with our mouths. However, the way we live our lives seems to say we don't really believe it at all. We have coworkers, classmates, neighbors and relatives we say we care about but we never shared with them the good news of the gospel. Our commitment is sadly lacking. In our text today the Apostle Paul challenges the people in Corinth (and us), to stop playing around in the area of evangelism. Paul calls us to play to win. He shows us the importance of giving up to gain.

Let's read 1 Corinthians 9:15-27...

In the year 1520 Martin Luther wrote a paper "On the Freedom of the Christian" with two basic propositions:
A Christian is an utterly free man, lord of all, subject to none.
A Christian is an utterly dutiful man, servant of all, subject to all.

Paul lived this out in that he knew that Jesus Christ had forgiven his sins and set Paul free from condemnation and the penalty of sin, but in this freedom in Christ, Paul made himself a slave to everyone for the sake of winning them to Christ. Paul was willing to "become all things to all people" in order to win some to Christ.

This did not mean compromising God's moral will, but it meant Paul's willingness to give up rights in order to gain opportunities to share the gospel. He was willing to sacrifice in order to be of service in the lives of others.

Paul never modified the message of Christ crucified to make it less of a scandal to Jews or less foolish to Greeks. The preacher of the changeless gospel could adapt himself, however, to changing audiences in seeking their ultimate welfare, their salvation.

Main point: In 1 Corinthians 9:15-27 Paul gives three reasons he gave up his rights so that unbelievers will be saved, believers will be sanctified, and God will be glorified.

To Offer the Gospel Freely. V. 15-18

To Win Unbelievers to Christ. V. 19-23

To Call Believers to Train to Win. V. 24-27

My prayer is we will each know our freedom in Christ and like Paul we will use that freedom to serve others and share the good news of Christ with them.

Paul was talking about priorities, the things that are really important to us in our lives. At the top of the list is sharing the gospel with unbelievers. Let's begin with the first reason Paul does accept financial compensation and that is:

I. To Offer the Gospel Freely

Verse 15...

In verses 1-14 Paul has just given six reasons why he had the right to be supported. In verse 15 he says, "But I have used none of these things." He would not take advantage of the right for any reason.

Lest the Corinthians think he had changed his mind and had given those six reasons to convince them to begin financially supporting him, Paul adds, "And I am not writing these things that it may be done so in my case." His thinking had not changed.

That was Paul's policy wherever he went. He reminded the Thessalonian church in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, "you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."

He would rather have been dead than have anyone think he preached and taught for money. He was not a prophet for hire, as was Balaam in Numbers 22. Paul declared to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:33-35 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Verse 16...

The Lord stopped him short one day on the road to Damascus, as he was on his way there to persecute Christians. At that time Paul was set apart as the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:3-6, 15; 26:13-18; cf. Rom. 11:13). Paul did not want to be "disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19), but he really had no choice. He was under compulsion. Like Jonah, Paul was chosen by God and given a mission, and he was compelled to preach (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17), and like Jonah, woe to him if he tried to evade his mission.

Verse 17...

If he had made the choice for himself to preach the gospel from some personal ambition, he could expect payment for the work he had done. Preaching, however, is not his choice. He is simply a steward, a manager of this

wonderful treasure called the gospel. The conclusion to Jesus' parable of the slave in Luke 17:7–10 captures the idea: "So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"

Verse 18...

What was Paul's reward? Paul's reward is that he preaches freely a free gospel that sets people free! His reward is serving the Lord and proclaiming His Master's gospel message that liberates a person to love and serve their neighbors and moves them to love because they have been loved in Christ.

Paul had incredible the joy of preaching the good news of the gospel without charge! This meant that no man could accuse him of underhanded motives or methods as he shared the Good News of Jesus Christ.

It is unfortunate when the ministry of the Gospel is sometimes hindered by an overemphasis on money. If you are here and perhaps you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, we do not ask you to give. We have a gift for you—eternal life through faith in Christ!"

Romans 6:23...

Several years ago, I heard a professional athlete say he loved playing his sport so much that he would play for free if he had to. The apostle Paul told a first-century church that he loved the gospel and human souls so much that he would preach for free if necessary. And he did! If there is ever to be a "stumbling block" that keeps a lost person from believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ, let it only be the gospel and nothing else.

Friends, let us gladly surrender any and every right necessary so that the lost may freely hear the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Jesus surrendered his rights and privileges to go to the cross to pay for your sin and mine. It is a small thing for us, like Paul, to follow in his footsteps and give up our rights to serve others and share the gospel with them.

Paul gave us his rights so that he could offer the gospel freely. Second, he gave us his rights

II. To Win Unbelievers to Christ

Look at verses 19-23...

In 5 of the 7 times Paul uses the phrase "win" he is speaking of evangelism in the strict sense of winning converts.

v. 19: "that I might win the more"

v. 20: "that I might win the Jews"

v. 20: "that I might win those under the Law"

v. 21: "that I might win those without Law"

v. 22: "that I might by all means save some"

in each of these cases Paul is speaking of winning lost people to Christ, which is one of Paul's primary reasons for living. It is his primary motive for ministry. Everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, slave and free, religious or pagan, needs to know Jesus Christ as Savior, and his reason for sharing the gospel with them is to win them to Christ.

In verse 19 Paul says...

Paul belongs only to Christ. He was bought by the blood of Jesus and redemptive work on the cross. Yet Paul willingly makes himself a slave to all people so that God can use him to bring (win) them to salvation.

Warren Wiersbe writes, “What a paradox: free from all men, and yet the slave of all men!” We must gladly surrender our rights and make ourselves servants of others so that we “win more” of them to our King.

Paul applies his principle of becoming a slave to all for the souls of all to the Jews. His words are simple, but they contain an important caveat in verse 20...

Paul identified himself first and foremost as a Christian. Yet Paul adapted, living as a Jew when with the Jews in order to win them to Christ. Paul did not return to honoring the sacrificial system that Christ fulfilled, the Lamb of God who died for the sins of the world. Paul did not, as he once incorrectly did, advocate a works-salvation theology.

But in Matthew 18:18 Paul himself would take a Nazirite vow and purified himself so that there would be no unnecessary offense in trying to win Jews to faith in Messiah Jesus. Paul would say, “When I go to their home, and they’re serving kosher, I will eat their food. If I’m having them over, I will serve kosher to them. Even though we’re set free from it, I’m going to fit into their world.”

Verse 21...

In verse 21 Paul now addresses his soul-winning relationship to Gentiles. His words in verse 21 are like those in verse 20, but they are not identical. He writes, “To those who are without the law, like one without the law—though I am not without God’s law but under the law of Christ—to win those without the law.”

Paul will flex to win Gentiles, too, but his flexing goes in a different direction. Paul, like every Christian, has been set free from the Mosaic covenant and its many ceremonial rules and regulations. But the Jews hated the Gentiles and referred to them as dogs. Cultural and social separation from so-called Gentile dogs was no longer a practice of Paul’s new life in Christ.

However, Paul is no antinomian (one with no law). His life is now guided and regulated by a new law, “the law of Christ.” How should we describe the law of Christ? Galatians 5:14 says, “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

Jesus said in John 13:34–35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

You see Jesus will transform your life from the inside out. He changes your heart and then changes your vision. The person, work, and teachings of Christ are now the lens in which you see everything! In 11:1 Paul says, “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.” His concern is ... obedience to Christ in day-to-day service. As a servant to all, Paul is first and foremost a servant of Christ.... He will not do what Christ would not do!

In other words, while Paul was willing to act like a Gentile socially, he would never act like one morally. His submission to the Law of Christ prevented him from ever doing that.

Paul brings his argument full circle in verse 22. He also adds a third category of persons, those he previously addressed in 8:7–13. He calls them “the weak.” This phrase is open to serious misunderstanding. Often, it is incorrectly understood in a derogatory sense.

However, Paul uses the phrase to identify new believers who were saved out of paganism and idolatry. Paul does not seek to win them to salvation, because they are already saved. Instead he seeks to win them to greater strength and maturity in Christ. Paul was willing conform his behavior to theirs to help them.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 that Darin read earlier sets the tone that should be our goal, “But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.”

Rosaria Butterfield grew up loving books and philosophy. In her late twenties, allured by feminist philosophy and LGBTQ+ politics, she adopted a lesbian identity. Rosaria earned her PH.D. from The Ohio State University in 1992, then served as a tenured professor of English and women’s studies at Syracuse University.

In 1997, while Rosaria was researching the Religious Right, she wrote an article in the newspaper against the religious right and their politics of hatred against people like her.

A local pastor Ken Smith responded to that article and invited Rosaria to have dinner with Ken and his wife Floy. That began a friendship where Rosaria regularly met with Ken and his wife, Floy, over dinners in their home. Ken and Floy were a witness to Rosaria in the way they patiently care for her and prayed for her and Rosaria could see the authenticity of their love for Christ, love for God’s Word, and love for people. In 1999, after reading through the Bible multiple times under Ken and Floy’s care, Rosaria gave her life to Jesus Christ.

Rosaria has written two wonderful books. The first book chronicles her conversion and is entitled, The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor’s Journey into Christian Faith.

The second book is the one I listed in your sermon outline. It is entitled, The Gospel Comes with a House Key, in that book Rosaria chronicles how the Lord used a humble couple’s simple invitation to dinner to draw her - a radical, angry, committed unbeliever—to himself.

Inviting readers into her house, Rosaria shows how God can use ordinary hospitality to bring the gospel to our lost friends and neighbors. Such hospitality sees our homes as not our own, but as God’s tools for the furtherance of his kingdom as we welcome those who look, think, believe, and act differently from us into our everyday, sometimes messy lives—helping them see what true Christian faith really looks like.

Paul can summarize his position in verse 23: “Now I do all this because of the gospel, so that I may share in the blessings.” The gospel of Christ above all enters the picture again. Fellow partaker (*sunkoinōnos*) refers to joint participation, joint sharing. The idea here is that Paul wanted everyone else to be a fellow partaker with him in the benefits and blessing of the gospel. He wanted them to be with him in the family of God.

Why did Paul serve others ahead of self? Why did Paul give up his rights? He did it first, to offer the gospel freely. Second, to win unbelievers to Christ. And third:

III. To Call Believers to Train to Win

Verses 24-27...

Here Paul appeals to a race and boxing to urge the Corinthians to train to win, to play to win. Paul begins with a rhetorical question, verse 24....

The Christian does not run the race in order to get to heaven. You are in the race if you have been saved through faith in Jesus. Your life is not a place for proving to God or anybody your strength. Life is a place for proving whose strength you trust — man’s or God’s.

Life is not a place for proving the power of your intelligence to know truth. It's a place for proving the power of God's grace to show truth.

In Matthew 16:15 Jesus asked His disciples, "But who do you say that I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

The race of life has eternal consequences not because we are saved by works, but because Christ has saved us from dead works to serve the living and true God with the passion of Olympic athletes.

The race of life has eternal consequences not because grace is nullified by the way we run, but because grace is verified by the way we run.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:10 "By the grace of God I am what I am and his grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored [I ran, I fought] more exceedingly than all, yet it was not I but the grace of God which was with me." Paul's running did not nullify the purpose of grace; it verified the power of grace.

Eternal life hangs on the way we run and the way we fight not because salvation is based on the merit of works, but because James 2:26 says faith without works is dead. Life is a proving ground for whether faith is alive or dead — a proving ground for whom we trust.

So at the end of 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul says, "Run in such a way that you may win." God has not saved you to sit in the stands. God has not saved you sit on the edge of the pool with your feet in the water. God has not saved you to lie down on the track.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says "You are not your own. You were bought with a price. Glorify God in your body" The point of salvation is to make the glory of God visible in the universe.

Verse 25a, "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things." The word for "competes" in the Greek is the word "*agonizomai*" from which we get our word "agony". The person who plays to win agonizes to know Christ more and to make Him known more.

Winning a race takes a great deal of practice. It takes devotion. It is hard work. When was in tenth grade I tried out for the high school wrestling team. So did my friend Phil Coghlan. In our junior year we both made the varsity team. Phil found out from a friend that there was a coach at a private school who offered free coaching after our public-school practices. Phil invited me to join him, but I could not envision going to two practices a day and was not willing to train that hard. Phil did, and in our second season of wrestling, Phil kept winning and winning and came one match short of being the Maryland state champion – and took 3rd place in the state tournament in Maryland.

Paul turns now to this problem of motivation. It is found in the prize.

Verse 25, "They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."

In Paul's day, the winner of the Olympic Games received an olive wreath that had been fashioned into the shape of a crown. This olive wreath was placed on his head. It declared him to be the winner.

This was the goal for which he strived. This was the motivation for all his training. He would wear the wreath and he would receive the acclaim from all the crowd. He was the winner. And then he would go home and place

that wrath over the mantle of his fireplace. The years would pass and the wreath would fade. Its leaves would turn brown and brittle to the touch. Finally, it would be thrown away.

Paul says that we have a much greater prize. We do not labor for a prize that will fall apart after a few years. We are striving for an eternal prize.

This ought to be a great source of motivation. What you do today is going to count for all eternity. One of those rewards will surely be the reward of knowing that you were used by God to bring someone else to faith in Christ. Imagine how wonderful it would be to walk around Heaven and see those who are in Heaven because you were faithful in sharing the truth with them. Personally, I can't imagine a greater reward.

Our ultimate blessing and reward would be to hear the Lord say to us, "Well done, good and faithful one!"

Verse 26...

Paul uses two illustrations to make his point.

There is the runner who runs in the right direction, staying on the track as he runs the race.

There is the boxer who makes every punch count, rather than wasting his effort in swinging at empty space.

In each illustration, the point is the same. Every move made in the course of his race was calculated to further his pursuit of the prize. Every blow struck was meant to land squarely on his opponent and send him reeling from the contest. To achieve this, Paul would not let his body master him; sometimes he denied even its demand for rightful privileges and pleasures for a greater good.

Paul says strive, labor, abound, be zealous, be earnest. Run like the winner runs. Be done with half-heartedness and laziness and lukewarmness. Christ has laid hold on you for this very thing.

Hebrews 12:1-3 says, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Verse 27...

One of the saddest things about any race is that it is possible to persevere through all of the training, exert all of the energy to run the entire course, only to be disqualified because of an infringement of the rules.

In the 1988 Olympics, Ben Johnson of Canada defeated defending Olympic champion Carl Lewis of the United States in the 100 meter sprint with a world record time of 9.79. But it became known as the dirtiest race in history when two days later, Johnson was stripped of his gold medal and world record by the International Olympic Committee after he tested positive for performing enhancing drugs.

There are rules that must be followed in any race or else the race is forfeit. The spiritual race that we run is no exception. What are the rules of the race? They are the commands that God has given to us. They are His instructions found in His Word. The temptation is always present to run in a haphazard direction, taking "short-cuts" and ignoring the rules. But to do so involves disaster. To do so will result in disqualification.

Paul was concerned that some might not be able to say with him one day his words found in 2 Timothy 4:7, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.”

How about you? How does this text and the things we’ve talked about today challenge you? If you’re a believer in Christ, how does it challenge you toward evangelism? What will you do?

Let me share a couple thoughts for you to pray about:

First, find a Christian who will pray with you, and you can encourage each other to be accountable in being a witness for Christ.

Second, open your home and your heart to unbelieving neighbors, coworkers, classmates, and friends.

Together let us be faithful to know Christ and make Him known in our actions and our words. Let’s give up some of our comforts and our rights in order to gain a hearing with others and share the gospel with them. Let’s play to win.

Will you pray with me...