

03.10.24

That Messed Up Church

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

### **INTRO (5 mins)**

Mike Tyson's punchout 8-bit video/music entrance

That was a snapshot into my childhood. Can anyone remember where you might recognize this? YES! Mike Tyson's Punchout. Glass Joe, King Hippo, and the Sandman. Of course you played as the under-rated up and coming boxing hero "Mac" coached by Doc. "Stick and move! Stick and move!"

Unlike games of today, the NES console didn't have any way of saving progress. You started from the very beginning when you wanted to play, and if you lost, that was it. Game over. You had to start from the very beginning. In some cruel ways for 80s kids like me it was a never-ending lesson in persevering through hardships.

Some games, like Punchout, gave you a passcode that allowed you to start at a certain level you reached in the game mode, and if you were smart enough to 1) right down the code correctly, and 2) remember where you kept the piece of paper you scribbled it onto you could use that passcode to jumpstart your progress the next opportunity you had to play the game.

So what does Mike Tyson's Punchout have to do with today's message? Well, for one, It's March 10<sup>th</sup> which I learned is MARIO day! And two – today's message focuses on freedoms and disciplines.

### **Freedoms and Disciplines**

### **TEXT (2 mins)**

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

*<sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

## CONTEXT (5 mins)

To understand verses 19-23 of chapter 9 you have to understand the broader context of what Paul is addressing in chapters 8 through 10. If you recall the church in Corinth is still in its infancy. The church Paul had established in the 18 months he spent in Corinth was showing signs of messiness, and Paul is writing to address the reports of what he had been hearing while across the sea in Ephesus. In chapters 1-4 Paul has tackled division in the church and the importance of unity in the faith, chapters 5-7 deal with sexual ethics, and now we find chapters 8-10 dealing with food, and in particular food sacrificed to idols in the various temples in Corinth.

So, the church in Corinth is YOUNG, less than 5 years old, and Paul is tackling issues with food in chapters 8-10.

Corinth is also distinctly ROMAN in its ethos. Geographically Corinth is a strategic port city located in Greece, but it has been a Roman colony for nearly 100 years at this point in history. And with ROMAN influence, the culture was largely pluralistic in its religious beliefs. This means that any of its inhabitants could worship whomever they wanted to as long as they were law-abiding and subservient to Roman rule.

Because of the pluralistic culture of Corinth there were several temples where meat would be sold for sacrifices to the various gods people worshiped, including temples to Aphrodite, Poseidon, and even some of the Roman emperors who had become deified.

Some of the Christians took issue with whether this meat could be eaten, since it had been sacrificed to idols at these pagan temples, and whether or not Christians should be joining in at the temples themselves for the food. Other Christians thought, "No big deal. Idols are nothing but man-made images that lead to nowhere, so who cares? What's the big deal? Eat up. I'm not hurting anyone."

## Here's Paul's response (10 Mins)

*V 19 – Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.*

Paul is citing his freedom found in Christ Jesus. He is not bound by anyone or anything. He is fully free. His life is fully on mission with Christ, and he understands that his identity is firmly rooted in who Jesus has called him to be. And yet he says in the text that even he is free, **Paul has made himself a slave to everyone**. This seems counter-intuitive, doesn't it? To lower your status to that of a slave is not something I think people would sign up for willingly. In our culture, so much of what we see is about building your own little empire – to amass as much wealth and influence as possible while you are healthy and able to do so. But here we see Paul saying that even though he is free, he has made the choice to be a slave

When you think of the word slave, your mind might turn to images of the early American South the injustices of that era. But if you look at the word slave in the original Greek the word is *Douloos*, pronounced doo-wah-low and it is defined as:

**Douloos - To give oneself wholly to one's needs and service, to make oneself a bondsman to another – permanent service**

**So Paul, who is fully free, is choosing to permanently give his whole self over to the needs and services of those he is hoping to reach.** Why? To win as many as possible to the gospel of Jesus.

His conviction to *reach one more* with the gospel of Jesus was enough for him to lay down his rights as one who is free in Christ not to achieve a more comfortable, squishy, soft, and privileged life. NO, Paul was fully given over to the needs of his audience.

He then gives four examples in the next several verses to expand his thought. And notice the pattern.

*Vv. 20-22 <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.*

To the different pockets of people he is trying to reach, he became like them.

**To Jews** he became LIKE a Jew. even though he himself was Jewish by birth, and at one point a devout Jewish teacher himself, a pharisee even.

*Philippians 3:5-6 <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*

Paul's statement matters here because while he is still ethnically Jewish, the way of Jesus is not a subset or addition to the Jewish faith. Christianity is a new way of life entirely. A new kingdom that Paul has wholly embraced. Paul's identity is rooted solely in the resurrected Jesus, and Paul is fully given to the Lordship of Jesus. However, Paul is saying to the Jew I become *like* a Jew – in observances such as ceremonial washings and food laws - in order to win them for the gospel.

**To those under the law** – Again, this is referring to practicing Jews in Corinth. To them, Paul becomes like one under the law, but then he adds, (though I myself am not under

the law). Paul expands his point to include that while practicing Jews find their justification and righteousness through the Jewish laws, and that Paul is choosing to observe them in order to win his audience to the gospel, he is not bound to the laws themselves. He is operating in the New Covenant of Christ Jesus.

**To those not having the law**— this would be the majority of the people Paul is engaging with in Corinth. Gentiles. People who are not ethnically or practicing Jews. Paul becomes like one not having the law.

Three uses of the word translated to Law here

Law - *nomos*.

Without the law – *anomos*

Under the law -*ennomos*

Paul is saying, to those who are *anomos*, without the law, Paul becomes like them, however he is not lawless. He is *ennomos*, or surrendered to the law of Christ.

And Finally **to the weak I become weak.**

-----^ I might tighten up the above section ^-----

~~This gets to the bigger point that Paul is addressing in the messy church of Corinth. Culturally there was the cultic practice of sacrificing animals to pagan idols, think of gods like Zeus, Aphrodite, Poseidon, and even some of the emperors of Rome who had been deified. To get meat, you'd have to go to the temples. For Christians with a Jewish background this would have been way out of bounds. "No way! This is detestable! We are not to observe such things!" To another group of Christians they might say, "we know that idols are nothing but man-made pieces of wood and stone with no power, so what's the big deal to eat meat sacrificed to them, because it has no meaning. I'm hungry, and I wanna enjoy this pulled pork sandwich!"~~

In all cases Paul is saying, Christian, if you are in the presence of those who would take issue with your freedoms, whether that is eating meat without any personal problems from the temples knowing they probably have been sacrificed in some pagan ritual, or taking steps to observe certain Jewish customs, rituals, and food laws, or being in the presence of someone who might be newer to their faith and could potentially draw a wrong conclusion, like some of those in Corinth, that it is ok to worship both Jesus and other gods, then CHOOSE to become a slave, a douloo, and willingly lay down your freedoms, so that you do everything within your power to win them over to the gospel of Jesus.

**ALL FOR SOME**

Vv. 22b-23 . *I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup>I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

This is not an all for one and one for all situation, it's an all for some scenario. I become all things to all people that by all possible means I might save some.

Why? For the sake of the gospel, **that I may share in its blessings.**

Don't miss this. The freedoms we enjoy in Christ are beautiful, but sharing in the blessings of the gospel as others who are lost, without hope, headed for a godless eternity come alive to the truth of who Jesus is and who they are IN Christ Jesus is a prize worth fighting for.

Paul is willing to lay aside his freedom in order to win some to the gospel of Jesus – to see people awaken to the truth of who Jesus is in his life, death, and resurrection. The blessings of seeing someone come alive to the salvation and hope that accompanies a life surrendered to the cross is what motivates Paul to become all things. And this not for believers, but for those who have yet to believe.

~~A way we like to word it here at CCC is posture over position. Our posture needs to be like that of a servant, rather than one who would power up to prove a position. Positionally you might be right about a particular topic. But if your posture isn't reflecting the same servant hearted nature of Jesus, you run the risk of winning the argument but losing person.~~

**So how do you do this, Paul? I'm not a super apostle like you.**

*<sup>24</sup>Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. <sup>25</sup>Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*

Paul turns to an illustration that those in Corinth would have identified with.

## **Corinth map**

The games Paul references here is the Isthmian games that would have been a biennial event – every two years athletes would complete in a series of games similar to the modern day Olympics. Feats of strength, endurance, skill, even musicianship and poetry were events that people would have trained for and competed against others in order to receive the honor and glory of being number one and obtaining a crown.

## Story of Heartland Hustle

I was in first grade and my dad and I signed up to run a one-mile race called the heartland hustle. The winner of that race won? A brand new Nintendo Entertainment System, complete with Super Mario Bros/Duck Hunt and a zapper.

After the race was over my parents were like, “welp, should we go get breakfast?” I was like, “why would we leave? I’m pretty sure I won the Nintendo.” I mean, wouldn’t you think the same thing as a first grader?

We didn’t stay. Instead we went to the Hardees at Northpark mall for breakfast. I wasn’t too happy. While we were eating, my dad disappeared and a few minutes later he came back with a bag and can you guess what was in the bag? A Nintendo! And, I said, “See?! I told you I won!!”

**The point here is that in the same way athletes of the Isthmian games competed with an expectation of winning, so we too should run after our Christian mission with the same focus.**

### **Strict Training**

Everyone who competes goes into strict training to get a crown. The crown that went to the victors of the games was nothing more than a wreath made of pine branches or some other greenery and the honor and glory that accompanied it, but I bet you can’t name a single athlete who competed in those games nearly 2000 years ago. It faded! It didn’t last, yet the amount of effort, resource, focus and discipline required to compete at the highest level was what was necessary to win.

It’s not hard for us to identify with that today. You see thousands and thousands of dollars spent on kids at elite sports training facilities hoping that one day they might be the best, go pro, win that superbowl, BigTen title, scoring record, or March Madness tournament, but guess what? It doesn’t last. Someone else will come along after 5-10-50 years and break that record. It fades.

But Paul is saying, the mission that we are called to? The race we are running? **WE DO IT FOR A CROWN THAT LASTS FOREVER!** Winning people to the gospel of Jesus is something that has eternal significance. Lives are changed, generations of families are forever impacted and you are invited into the mission by Jesus to help win some for the sake of the gospel.

*<sup>26</sup> Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. <sup>27</sup> No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

What does it take to be an elite athlete? To compete at the highest levels? To be the best in your field? Strict training. Serious commitment. Singularity of Focus.

What does it take to be able to lay down your freedoms and take the posture of a servant to those you are trying to reach. Strict training. Serious commitment. Singularity of focus.

We call this discipleship.

What God has called us to in our walk with him is a lifetime of intentional, focused, becoming like Jesus. We look at ourselves and others in the same way Jesus did. We are not better. We humble ourselves. We take the posture of a servant. We elevate Jesus and live as people marked with LOVE as we proclaim the truth of the gospel everywhere we go.

One way of entering into strict training is by taking seriously the spiritual disciplines that help believers to grow in faith and love for the God we serve.

## **Spiritual Disciplines**

Inward, Outward, Corporate

Unlike a video game, there are no cheat codes to maturing in the faith. There is no shortcut you can take to obtain the mind of Christ Jesus. It's only through a lifetime of intentional singular focus of surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus and taking the same posture as he modeled for us, who being in very nature God became a servant and obedient to death, even death on a cross.

**CLOSE**