

Freely a Slave

1 Corinthians 9:15-23

15 But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.

16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.

20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;

21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.

22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

Passage Summary:

Earlier in this letter to the Corinthians Paul appealed to the Corinthians to remain in the condition in which they had been called (7:17–24). He wrote about the paradox of



slavery and freedom. The slave is a freed person of the Lord; the one who is free is a slave of Christ (7:22). In vv. 15–18 Paul applies this paradox in self-referential fashion. Having affirmed his freedom (9:1) and having set forth a defense of his rights in the hearing of the community (9:3–14), Paul alludes to his situation as a slave of Christ. He may be free but he acts in a way that is fitting for a slave of Christ. Because he is a slave of Christ he is not to be paid for the proclamation of the gospel. He is one to whom a task (*oikonomia*, literally “the task of household management,” 9:17; cf. 4:1–2) has been assigned. Paul must do his duty. Woe to him if he does not fulfill the task that has been entrusted to him!

In 9:19–23 he continues to explain himself. Note the explanatory “for,” with which the pericope begins. Paul begins by explaining that despite being free he has indentured himself. The phrase clearly sums up what he had obliquely stated in the preceding pericope. The allusion to his freedom, however, harks back to 9:1, where Paul’s opening statement to the Corinthian jury asked them to consider him a free man. Paul will not be enslaved by anyone or anything (6:12c–d), yet he will make himself a slave. The norm of his freedom is the advantage that accrues to others (6:12a–b). Ultimately the freedom Paul enjoys is paradoxical (cf. 7:22). Although free, he has indentured himself.

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Outline:

- I. Live as a Slave to God (vv. 15-18)*
 - II. Live as a Slave to Others (vv. 19-22)*
 - III. Live as a Slave to the Gospel (v. 23)*
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1. In verse 15, Paul says that he used none of his apostolic “rights” or “freedoms.” How does Paul's attitude toward his “freedoms” challenge and encourage you to think about your own liberties/preferences?

2. Paul said that he had no reason for boasting, even though he accomplished so much for Christ! How does this encourage us to think about our own obedience?
 - In what ways do we sometimes seek recognition or praise for our obedience to God?
 - How does our perspective on all of life change when we see ourselves as those who have been “entrusted” with a “stewardship from God? **Cf. Luke 17:7-10**

3. In verse 18, Paul says that his “reward” was to offer the gospel without charge. What does this tell us about Paul's heart/attitude? How should we seek to emulate his example?

4. In verses 19-23, Paul explains that the motivation to forgo his freedoms and change his habits was that “he might win some.” Should we be concerned about “winning the lost” to Christ? How can cultivate a greater love for the lost?
 - What is a practical way that we might adapt ourselves to the customs of those around us in order to advance the gospel?



5. How can we balance respecting the cultural preferences and convictions of others with remaining faithful to the unchanging truth of the gospel?

6. Reflect on Paul's statement in verse 23: "I do all things for the sake of the gospel." How can we cultivate a similar mindset in our own lives?
 - ➔ Though not many of us are called to be preachers or missionaries, how can we all live our lives for the sake of the gospel?

Prayer Topics:

Pray that each member of ABC would be willing to die to self for God's glory, the gospel, for the lost, and for one another!

