

We Are Free For A Purpose
1 Corinthians 9:19-23
Sunday, May 6th, 2018
By Ryan Perry

Passage:

1 Corinthians 9:19–23

[19] For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. [20] 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. [21] 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. [22] 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. [23] I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Pray

Introduction

According to 2017 study done by the *American Culture and Faith Institute* (AFCI), only 25% of people who would call themselves Christians believe that they are called to promote the gospel.

Also according to this same research only 23% of adults who have **any sort of faith** share their faith with another person on a monthly basis. Now, you might start to feel good about that statistic because that means that 23% of Christians are sharing their faith monthly.

However, that 23% is largely comprised of people who are either sharing a faith that is non-Christian or they are sharing a version of Christianity that is not biblically grounded.

This means that a fairly small amount of people even believe it is important to promote the cause of Christ, and an even smaller amount are actually sharing a biblically accurate understanding of Christ and the gospel on a semi-regular basis.

As the research shows, this has been resulting in the decline in the church over the past few decades. Things like church attendance, professions of faith, and baptisms are at an all-time low. We have also seen a drastic drop off in people who are biblical literate (know and read the Bible), and those who pray or even believe in prayer.

The reality is that we in America have become a people who are apathetic to the things of Christ. Our faith in Christ does not captivate us, our God does not satisfy us, and we have lost, as a very basic foundation, an understanding of why we have been set free by Christ.

Or to say it in a more succinct way: **We have lost our delight in Christ, and we have lost the purpose we have been given by Christ.**

Now before you begin to think that I am about to launch into a message on how we all need to be street preachers and preach the gospel 10 times a days, I want you to first understand my reasoning for picking this passage and topic, and then I want to share my aim and desire for what I am about to say this morning.

My reasoning for picking this passage this morning is because I have been convicted by God through the words of the apostle Paul. I have been convicted by the reality that I have lost my zeal for Christ, my joy in Christ, and in turn I have completely lost the yearning to fulfill the purposes for which God saved me and freed me in and through Christ.

Even though I am free in Christ I have lost my yearning to win others to Christ so that they might experience the same freedom. I have lost my yearning to see the name and fame of Christ spread across our region and the globe. And I have lost the yearning to fully participate in the blessings of Christ that flow from a life well lived and sacrificed for him.

If I am honest, I want to use my freedom to have an easy and happy life where I don't have to do and experience hard things.

I have made the highest end of my own personal existence about having good and moral kids, having a clean house and a nice yard, having nominal and surface relationships with my neighbors, and about having a church where I can theoretically talk about following Christ and killing sin without ever really walking in holiness, or in obedience to the call of Christ.

So that's me, and if this message is mainly for me this morning, that's okay. But I will say that I don't think I'm alone.

So my hope this morning, in these few minutes that we have together, is that these words in 1 Corinthians 9, breathed out by God, through the apostle Paul, will first convict us of the ways that we have been apathetic toward Christ and his gospel. **(That is an overarching hope and goal)**

But specifically, my hope is that these few passages of scripture will help us to better understand why we have been saved and set free in Christ in the first place:

1. That we are free in Christ to win others for Christ.
2. That we are free in Christ to serve others for Christ.
3. That we are free in Christ to participate in the blessings of Christ.

And may we all leave here this morning with a greater Holy Spirit wrought passion to live every moment for the purpose of spreading the kingdom of Christ and experiencing the blessings of Christ that flow from that.

With that said, let's look at our first point this morning.

1. We are free in Christ to win other for Christ. (V. 19)

*[19] For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, **that I might win more of them.***

Paul starts off this section of scripture talking about the freedom that he has in Christ. However, he is not necessarily talking about the freedom that he has from sin and death because of the finished work of Christ.

Instead, he is instead talking about the social freedoms he has as a Christian, minister and apostle of Christ. For instance:

+Paul knew that he was free from the dietary restrictions of the mosaic law and could eat food sacrificed to idols according to 1 Cor. 9:4.

+He knew he had the right to take a believing wife according to 1 Cor. 9:5, but instead he chose to live free of making use of that right.

+He even knew, as an apostle, that he had the right to get paid for his ministry according to 1 Cor. 9:6-12, but instead he chose to present the gospel free of charge (1 Cor. 9:18).

Paul in all of this is highlighting the idea that he is free and indebted to no one, and he is under no man made law. But this is not some selfish freedom that allowed Paul to do whatever he wanted.

No, this was a freedom that called and compelled Paul to serve others or become a slave to others for a purpose. **The purpose that compelled Paul to become a servant or slave of all was the purpose was winning others to and for Christ.**

As Paul says in verse 20:

*[20] 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.***

Or in verse 21 Paul says:

*[21] 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.***

In this section of scripture alone Paul refers to winning others for Christ five times. And if that isn't enough he ends verse 22 by making his point even more clear.

*“...I have become all things to all people, **that by all means I might save some.**”*

Paul was not just about making people favorable to Christ. He was not just about making people feel good about Christ so that they will wear a **Jesus is my homeboy t-shirt**. No. He understood that the wrath of God was upon the vast majority of people around him.

This truth compelled Paul to use his freedom in Christ in such a way that those around him would come to know the surpassing worth of Christ, and that they would have the same hope of an eternity with Christ that he had.

But there's more. As we look at this passage we see that there was something that compelled Paul even more than just winning and saving souls, though that is a grand and noble purpose in and of itself.

In the first part of verse 23 Paul writes:

“...I do it all for the sake of the gospel...”

What drove Paul and compelled him to win and save souls for Christ was the advancement of the gospel.

The gospel that includes the global, cosmic, and kingdom building work that God is doing to reconcile a people to himself for his glory.

Paul believes that he has been set free in Christ for the purpose of winning and saving souls so that God's glorious kingdom will be advanced and his glory will reign supreme.

As Paul writes one chapter later in 1 Corinthians 10:31-33:

[31] So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. [32] Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, [33] just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

What about us? What do we believe about our freedom in Christ? Do we believe we have been set free to live however we would like? Do we believe that we have been set free to be a social club as a church? Do we believe that we have been set free to have a good job, a nice 401K, and good kids?

Or do we actually believe the soul stirring truth that we are set free for more? **Do we believe that we have been set free in Christ to daily work for the advancement of his great and glorious kingdom? And as a result, do we believe that the fruit of that work should be the winning and saving of souls for Christ.**

Let me ask again, do we believe this? **Do I believe this? Because this is the great, gospel spreading, God glorifying, and kingdom building purpose for which you and I have been saved and set free in Christ.**

So then, if that is the purpose of our freedom, what does that actually look like in practice.

2. We are free in Christ to serve others for Christ.

Once again, Paul writes in verse 19.

[19] For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all,

Paul is so compelled by his desire and purpose of spreading and proclaiming the gospel that he uses his freedom in Christ to literally become a servant, or the often better rendering “slave.”

Now we have seen this kind of language from Paul before. In Romans 1:1 Paul writes:

“[1] Paul, a servant (bondservant or slave) of Christ Jesus,”

This type of language is common to Paul. He understands that he is controlled by Christ, and that he is under his authority. And most of us would even say the same things about ourselves.

We believe that we are free to be a servant of Christ who is under his authority.

But what Paul is saying takes this idea even further. Paul, because he is free in Christ, is not just a servant of Christ, but he willingly makes himself a servant of everyone.

I have to be honest; I normally like to skip over that part of the verse. Because I don't like what that verse is telling me. I am totally okay with the idea of saying I am a servant of Christ because then the application to my life remains theoretical, and I can sort of make it up as I go.

I can be okay with either being hot or cold for Jesus. I can occasionally pray for people but only when it isn't an inconvenience. I can do something nice for people as long as it doesn't interrupt my schedule. And I can occasionally have a conversation with someone where I tell them that I am a pastor or maybe mention the name of Jesus and I can feel like I have served them, and have been a faithful servant or slave of Christ.

But when Paul says, **“I have made myself a slave or bondservant of all...”** he is forcing me to realize that my theoretical ideas about being a servant of Christ are far shallower than what God actually intends to be true of me.

God's intention for my life and yours is that we would use every moment of our lives not for ourselves, not for our own advantage, and not for our own pleasure, **but for the good and building up of others.**

And we do this, as we said in point one, so that God's kingdom will be advanced and people will be won to Christ.

And if we are wondering what this might look like in our lives, Paul gives us examples of what this means. He says in verse 20:

[20] To the Jews I became as a Jew...To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law)...

Verse 21:

[21] 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)

And Verse 22

[22] To the weak I became weak... I have become all things to all people...

So what does this mean? **For Paul, this meant that he not only spent time with people who were lost (Jews, Greeks, and weak), but he worked hard to live with them in a way that made Christ attractive to them that he might win or save some of them.**

Does this mean that Paul compromised his Christianity to spread the gospel? No. That is why he says in verse 21 ***“not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ.”***

So yes, at times Paul was willing to partake of Jewish feasts and rituals to win Jews, and was at times okay with eating food that was probably sacrificed to idols to win Greeks, and he was at times okay with refraining from his freedom to eat and drink freely for the sake of winning the weak. **But he did it all as a slave of Christ who was unwilling to compromise the gospel with his actions.**

What does this mean for us? I will say two things.

One, it means that we need to reach across the aisle. As Christians, it is easy for us to stay in our holy huddle. For the most part it's safe in here. We know what is expected of us and more often than not we know that we will be around people like us.

But the gospel compels us to go out into the world. It compels us to know, love, and serve our lost neighbors, co-workers, family members, and communities. It compels us to actually work to invest our lives in other people outside these walls, and to live our lives, and our moments in service to other people, instead of service to ourselves.

Second, it means that we do this for the purpose of making Christ known. We don't just raise our kids to have good kids. We don't just talk to our neighbors to be friendly, we don't just get to know co-workers so that work is less boring, and we don't just invest in our communities so we can feel a sense of altruism or selfless concern for that particular city.

No, we seek to interact and build relationships around us, and invest in others people's lives in a way that that gains favor with them so that they would come to know Christ.

But this requires us to first be willing to serve others. This means we need to die to our own self-interests and we need to be willing to look to the interests of others. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:24:

“[24] Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.”

So like Paul we are set free to be servants and slaves of Christ and those around us for the purpose of advancing the kingdom of Christ.

But this is not just lifeless and joyless kingdom service, in fact it is the opposite.

This is our last point.

3. We are free in Christ to participate in the blessings of Christ.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:23:

*[23] I do it all for the sake of the gospel, **that I may share with them in its blessings.***

This verse sums up the dual purpose for why Paul is seeking to serve others and win them to Christ.

We already talked about the first purpose in point one which is the advancement of the gospel of Christ. Paul's life purpose, first and foremost, is to pour himself out in service to other people that they would come to know Christ so that the kingdom of God would expand and our great God and king would be glorified.

The second purpose, which is closely connected to the first, is that Paul would serve others and proclaim the gospel so that he can share in its blessings. And the logical question is “what are the blessings or benefits of the gospel that Paul wants to share or participate in?”

I want to point out three for you this morning.

1. The hope of eternal life with Christ.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9:27:

[27] But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Now this is not Paul saying that he could lose his salvation, but he is instead echoing the words of 2 Peter 1:10:

[10] Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Or the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:13 which say:

[13] But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

The reality is that though Paul believes that he has been elected and predestined by God as his child, he also knows that his election is confirmed by how he lives. **In the same way how you and I live today is an indication of whether or not we belong to Christ.**

So Paul's desire is to live every moment for Christ and the spreading of his kingdom so that he can live assured that he hasn't run this race called Christianity in vain. **He wants the blessings of an eternal hope and life with Christ.**

2. The Joy of the Gospel.

Jesus says in John 15:10-11:

[10] If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. [11] These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Or as Paul writes in Romans 15:13:

“[13] May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing...”

Jesus and Paul are saying the same thing in these verses. The fruit of a life that believes, trusts, and follows, and proclaims Christ is, Holy Spirit produced joy and delight that will last forever. **Do we want joy and delight in Christ this morning? Then we should be compelled to serve Christ and others for the advancement of his kingdom.**

3. The Eternal Joy of a Life Well Lived for Christ.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20:

[19] For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? [20] For you are our glory and joy.

We know that we are called by scripture to store up treasures in heaven. And though the Bible doesn't give us a full picture of what those treasures are we do know that how we live our life today directly impacts our experience of joy in eternity. This is why Paul called the Thessalonians his joy at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

He knew that they were and are a confirmation of a life well lived for Christ. **And he also knew that the resulting reward from Christ would be everlasting glory and joy in an abundant measure.**

And these treasures are not just for Paul but they are for us as well.

Closing:

So my plea for all us, **but mostly for myself**, is that we will begin to think differently about our freedom in Christ. **Let us not waste our freedom on our own passions and earthly desires.**

Instead let us all live as if we have been set free in Christ for the cosmic purpose of spreading his gospel and kingdom by winning souls for Christ. **Eternity is at stake.**

May this cause us to live every moment not only in service to Christ, but to serve other people for the purpose of making Christ known.

And may we run and live every moment this way knowing that it is a confirmation of our hope in Christ, that we will receive the daily joy of a life lived in obedience to Christ, and we will receive eternal glory and joy from Christ in abundance when he returns.

Let's Pray.