

## CGYG & LIFE Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 9:15-27

Dale's short-term team was two months into their three month-long missions trip, and they were tired and discouraged. It had been an exhausting time, with everyone working 14 hours a day or more, without seeing much fruit... so they were excited to be going on an all-expense-paid weekend retreat at a five-star resort in the countryside, courtesy of a local Christian businessman. As they were on their way out, the phone rang. It was Ivan, the atheist who seemed to have gone out of his way to make life miserable for them, and who showed up at all their events, it seemed, just to eat their snacks and to challenge and ridicule them. Though they had visited with him in his home a couple times, he seemed closed to the Gospel. Ivan explained that he and his wife had to work this weekend, and they needed someone to babysit his kids Saturday and Sunday. "Ugh," thought Dale as he hung up. "He's just taking advantage of us... Does he take us for fools?" Explaining the situation to the team, he asked what they thought. After a minute of stunned silence, Jan spoke up. "Well, I think everyone is really tired, and we all really need to get some rest so we can stay focused on the work. So I think we should all go for the retreat. I'm sure he can find someone else to babysit." The rest of the team nodded in agreement... "I think so too," said Dale. "I'll call him back to let him know we'll be out of town."

Then Tom spoke up. "I'll stay," he said. "I've really been looking forward to this retreat, but I can't give up an opportunity like this to reach out to Ivan and his family."

In this story, who do you identify with the most, and why?

### Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-27

**-For review:** In 9:15, Paul says, "But I have made no use of any of these rights..." What rights was he talking about (9:1-14)? Why didn't he make use of these rights (v.12)?

-his rights as an apostle of Jesus Christ (v.1-14)

-in particular, his right to be financially supported for the work he was doing, and to take along a believing wife with him, like the other apostles (v.4ff)

-he uses several arguments and analogies from every day life and from Scripture to demonstrate that he has these rights

-yet, he was making it clear that he was not 'writing these things to secure any such provision' (v.15)

-he did not make use of his rights, so as not to put any obstacle in the way of the Gospel – more on this in the next study

### Read 1 Corinthians 9:15-18

-In v.15, Paul reiterates that he did not make use of his any of his rights as an apostle, and that he wasn't "writing these things to secure any such provision." What other reason does he give in v.15-18 for why he didn't use these rights? What is his 'boasting' about? (you might also consider 1 Cor. 1:28-29,31; 2 Cor. 10:17; 11:30, 12:9)

-these verses are acknowledged to be difficult to understand

-the general sense of what Paul is saying is clear, but the specifics of his reasoning are not as easy to grasp

-Paul's 'boasting' is not out of pride, or ultimately about himself, but about Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:28-29, 31; 2 Cor. 10:17; 11:30, 12:9)

-a sense of joy and fulfillment in that comes from obeying God freely and willingly, and seeing what God is doing through him

-for Paul, there's a sense in which his preaching the Gospel is not his choice

-God 'arrested' him on the road to Damascus → saved him and appointed him to preach

-as a result, Paul was 'compelled' to preach – "necessity" was laid upon him (v.16)

-he has a 'stewardship' of the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1-2 - "stewards of the mysteries of God" who must prove faithful)

→ "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" – his salvation & call to preach the Gospel were inseparable; he would prove an unfaithful steward if he did not preach

-if he preaches just out of this necessity, he's just 'doing his job' and there's no special reward

-but if he does it freely/willingly, he will have a reward

-while he is compelled to preach, his joy is in preaching freely/willingly – not because he's forced to do so

-not taking advantage of his rights is perhaps Paul's way of showing that he is preaching entirely out of his desire to make Christ known – i.e. that he is preaching freely/willingly, and not just under compulsion

### Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

-What other "rights" did Paul give up, and why?

-he gave up whatever freedoms he had (v.19: he was 'free from all') and made himself a "slave to all" → not for its own sake, but in order to try to win as many people as possible to Christ through the Gospel

-i.e. he gave up his right to live as he pleased, but lived in such a way as to maximize opportunities for the Gospel

-he wanted to be able to share in the blessings of the Gospel, with those he'd reached with the Gospel (v.23)

-part of the reward he was seeking, in 9:15-18

-What did Paul mean (and what didn't he mean) when he said, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some"? (v.22) Did becoming "all things to all men" mean that he changed the Gospel for different crowds? (cf. 1 Cor 1:17-25, 2:1-5) What does this teach us about evangelism?

- Paul sought to live as others do (rather in accordance with his own comfort level or preferences), so that he could gain a hearing with them for the Gospel
  - a 'lifestyle evangelism' of sorts; took on the cultural preferences/expressions of those he was trying to reach, so as not to offend them unnecessarily (i.e. by things other than the "offense of the Cross")
- to the Jews/those under the Law, he lived like a Jew/one under the (Mosaic) Law, in order that he might win them to Christ (v.20)
  - followed Jewish customs, dietary restrictions, etc., so as not to turn them off from hearing them even before he got to the Gospel (e.g. even had Timothy circumcised because people knew his father was a Gentile (!) – Acts 16:3)
  - at the same time, he emphasizes that he himself was not 'under the Law' – i.e. not bound to keep the Law in order to be made acceptable/justified before God
    - Paul was strongly opposed those who required adherence to the Law/Jewish customs in order to be saved (e.g. circumcision – Acts 15), even if he was willing to live in that way in order to be able to share the Gospel with them
- to those 'outside the Law' (i.e. Gentiles), he was willing to live as one 'outside the Law', that he might win them to Christ (v.21)
  - e.g. willing socialize with them & eat whatever they ate, to gain opportunities to share Christ with them
  - at the same time, he emphasizes that he is not outside God's law, but is still under the law of Christ – i.e. as Christ's follower, is still bound to live in obedience to Him
    - i.e. though he lives as one 'outside the Law', he is not free to sin in how he interacts with them (e.g. can't commit sexual immorality to reach prostitutes; can't worship idols to reach idolaters)
- to the weak, he became weak, that he might win the weak (v.22)
  - most likely referring back to the controversy over eating meat offered to idols (1 Cor. 8); perhaps another reference to Gentiles coming out of idolatry?
    - Paul willing never to eat meat (1 Cor. 8:13), so as not to cause anyone to stumble
- Did not mean that he could change the message of the Gospel, e.g. to make it more palatable
  - in 1 Cor. 1-2, he'd argued strongly that the message of the Cross itself is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (1:17-25, 2:1-5)
    - the message of the Cross is the wisdom & power of God for salvation → tampering with it / trying to introduce human wisdom empties the Cross of its power (1 Cor. 1:18)
  - need to convey the message such that people can understand it, but the core of the Gospel message cannot change

### Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

- What does the analogy of an athlete competing in the Games say about Christian life and service?
- Corinth was known for the Isthmian Games, an athletic competition which occurred every 2 years near Corinth
    - 2<sup>nd</sup> in prominence to the Olympic Games in Athens; drew athletes from all over to compete
    - if Paul was in Corinth for 18 months, very possible he was there during the time of one of the Games
  - analogy speaks of the hard, focused work & personal discipline required to attain the prize (cf. the reward Paul speaks of earlier)
  - if athletes train so hard and exercise such focus & discipline for a perishable reward, how much more should Christians do so to gain an imperishable reward!
    - need to have single-minded focus ("I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air") & exercise the discipline required to 'win the prize' in our lives, our witness, our service (v.26-27)
      - i.e. the sort of discipline Paul exercised over his body & his personal desires, in giving up his freedoms for the sake of the Gospel

-What does Paul mean by not being "disqualified" (v.27)? (cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15)

- Not 'disqualified' from the race in terms of losing his salvation/failing to reach the end
- rather, taking care not to lose the reward promised for faithful servants through lack of discipline/unfaithfulness on his part
  - e.g. building with wood, hay, straw → burned up on the day when everyone's work will be tested with fire (1 Cor. 3:10-15)

-What is one way you can apply the principles taught in 1 Corinthians 9 to your life, your witness, your service?

### Reflection and application

In contrast to the Corinthian believers, who were always insisting on their rights, Paul intentionally gave up his rights for the sake of the Cross. Instead of lording his rights as an apostle over other believers, he made himself a slave to everyone, becoming the "scum of the world" and "the refuse of all things" (4:13), for the joy and privilege of being able to share the Gospel of Christ freely and without hindrance (v.12-18). And as an Olympic athlete must discipline himself in order to win the race, Paul disciplined himself severely so that he might not lose his reward on the Day when his work would be tested with fire (cf. 1 Cor 3:12-15).

How are you serving your Lord? In your life and service, do you more resemble the Corinthians, who guarded their 'rights and freedoms' jealously for their own benefit, or Paul, who gladly gave up his rights, if only he could reach more people for Christ? Learn to discipline yourself as Paul did, running in such a way as to get the prize (v.24), using all that you are and all that you have for the sake of the gospel of Christ.