

[United] True Freedom, pt2: free to pursue a greater reward

1 Corinthians 9

MPS: Christians sacrifice rights of liberty to serve for a greater reward in faithful witness.

OBJ: Every Christian can pursue faithfulness in serving God's Kingdom mission by three facets.

INTRO In our series entitled UNITED: Together in the Gospel, a study of 1 Corinthians, we are laboring for one thing; to live as a people united in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Unity fuels God's people for kingdom mission in the world.**

Recap Last week we began looking at true freedom and understanding the Christian life through a gospel-centered framework. Last week we saw that Christians never create stumbling blocks to a faithful witness, by living out **the foundational principle** of love, the **foundational doctrine** that Jesus is Lord, and a **careful application**, exercising a right is always conditioned that it will not cause another to stumble. **Freedoms of Christian liberty never rule us as lord, but serve to help and enable our service to the Lord.**

1 Cor 8 taught us that freedoms from Christian liberty can, and should, be sacrificed for the sake of gospel mission. Today we build our understanding of faithful witness in Christian liberty in 1 Cor 9 by understanding...

MPS: Christians sacrifice rights of liberty to serve for a greater reward in faithful witness.

TRANS The greatest glory is not indulgence of Christian liberties for personal enjoyment / pleasure, but one's willingness to give up personal freedoms for greater reward in gospel mission, making Christ known.

Paul provides a personal example and enlarges our understanding of Christian liberties. (9:1-14) He begins by stating what is true because of his salvation in the Lord, a new knowledge. (.1-2) He is free in Jesus, an Apostle of Jesus, a personal witness of Jesus' after the resurrection, and a faithful workman of Jesus' mission. He lists all the "rights" that are his because of his liberty in Christ Jesus. He draws from other examples that are normal and natural to the people, such as a soldier, farmer or shepherd. (.3-6)

1 Corinthians 9 defines Christian liberty as not only freedoms, but also "rights". Paul's use of the word "rights" (GR: *exousia*) in 1 Cor 8:9 refers to a freedom (eating). His use of the same word in chapter 9 refers to more than a freedom, to include a "right". **Sacrifice of Christian liberties for the sake of mission includes both freedoms and rights.**

Paul uses human authority and God's Law to establish "rights". (.8-12a) From a human perspective, compensation makes sense. From God's Law he cites Deuteronomy 25:4 where God establishes that we must be concerned with compensation for people, just as we care for animals. Both perspectives justify his argument. Paul completes his argument by stating that God's laborers sow spiritual labors that we might reap material provisions, as any other laborer would. He refers to the justification of human and godly authority when he says "*rightful claim*" (*exousia*) to receive compensation for his labor. **The hope of provision from fruitful labors motivates the laborer in his and/or her work.**

"Nevertheless", Paul states, as he turns his argument to make his point. (.12b-14) It is right to compensate with material provisions those who sow in spiritual labors. Paul establishes that he was rightfully due compensation from preaching the gospel, but a greater reward motivated him. He refused to claim his "right" so it wouldn't get in the way of gospel mission. **Freedoms and rights of Christian liberty should always serve God's greater glory and purpose in our lives.**

In Christian liberty, both our freedoms, those things we are free to partake in, and our rights, those things that we are lawfully and rightfully due, should never be allowed to become a stumbling block to the gospel. Both pale in comparison to God's greater reward. In other words, what the Law establishes as a "right" does not necessarily determine its highest good or glory. **Faithfulness in Christian witness and service in gospel mission promise a greater reward than even the liberties that we enjoy in Christ.**

TRANS “But...” (.15) Paul has not exercised his right, nor is he planning to by writing this. He is completely justified in right compensation for preaching the gospel. But he gladly gives up his right compensation for a what is greater!

? **WHAT could possibly be greater than the full enjoyment of our freedoms and the provisions of our rights?**

Here we arrive at the center of our main point today.

Christians sacrifice rights of liberty to serve for a greater reward in faithful witness.

OBJ: Every Christian can pursue serving God’s kingdom as a faithful witness by **three facets**.

Facet 1: The MOTIVATION for faithful witness. .15-18

Paul did not make use of his freedoms or rights because he wanted nothing to distract from the gospel. He didn’t want to forsake his principle motivation, “*ground for boasting*”, in serving the Corinthians. He couldn’t boast in preaching because he refused compensation. He lived under divine compulsion to preach. (.16) Even without compensation, his “right”, he remained under compulsion to preach. This compulsion describes his call from God. He considered it a curse on him if he didn’t preach. He couldn’t boast in preaching because of the faithful exercise of his gift, or for any personal satisfaction. Regardless his giftedness, or lack of, which many Corinthians were contending, he was still entrusted with a stewardship to preach the gospel. (.17) Paul understood that the principle purpose for his life was to preach the gospel, regardless the company he kept, the city he entered, the culture he encountered or the cost he incurred. **God’s call should consume every Christian as the focus and direction for life.**

“*What then is my reward?*”, he asks. **What motivates Paul to remain faithful in his witness and mission?**

“*That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*” (.18)

Paul’s reward was to fully entrust his life into God’s care for His eternal reward. He wanted to preach without compensation to remove any stumbling block for the people. Paul refused any personal earthly, immediate reward so all would be entrusted to his eternal investment. **Paul’s motivation for faithful witness and service rested in God’s eternal reward, sacrificing both personal pleasure and provision.**

God’s eternal reward is immeasurably greater than all our sacrificed freedoms and rights. The Christian reward becomes the difference between “the exercise of our gifts and claims of our freedoms” against the “extent to which our compensation or indulgence on the earth does not equal their exercise or claim”. In other words, Christians “give no attention” nor “keep records” of what we’ve earned, what we deserve, or what we are allowed. Christians are motivated for faithful by God’s reward in His accounting. We entrust our lives, both now and in eternity, to God’s full provision. We live for God commands, what He desires, what serves Him first and how we can remain faithful to His mission, whether or not there is any earthly reward in these things or not. **Christians entrust their lives to God for His eternal glory.**

The REWARD of God’s eternal glory is the Christian’s defining motivation. God’s reward provides our defining motivation even though we do not know what it is or how much it is or anything else about it, except that it will be in proportion to the very character and nature of God, the giver. (When you think about how risky that sounds, it’s no wonder so many people use Christianity for personal pleasure and good now.) But, because God’s reward is always in accordance with the character and nature of the giver, God himself, it is guaranteed to be more glorious than imaginable, more good than conceivable, more generous than containable, more lavished than could have been deserved. **God’s reward is FAR MORE glorious, great, good, and generous than the grandest imagination anyone could conceive.**

God’s reward remains the Christian’s greatest motivation for faithfulness in witness and service. Our reward is more than what we get from God, but that we get God to be with Him forever, and, that we share in multiplying His glory as we share His great love with as many as possible while we are here on this earth. **For the Christian, what we are allowed and what we are owed never provide more hope than God’s name being made known.**

ILLUS God's REWARD >>>is FAR greater than>>> our freedoms enjoyed or rights compensated.

The greatness of God's reward determined the motivation for why Daniel said "No" to King's rich diet and fare, so he could say "Yes" to the Lion's Den; for WHY Shadrach, Meshach and Adebngo said "No" to bowing to the King, so they could say "Yes" to the fiery furnace; for WHY Peter said "No" to being crucified like Jesus, so he could say "crucify me upside down"; for WHY Job said "No" to cursing God, so he could say "I know that my Redeemer lives and in the end I will stand."

Needless to say, but it should not go unsaid: God's reward will not always make sense in a worldly, human economy. But God will always make sure that it never fails to satisfy, magnify and glorify for eternal impact. MOTIVATION for the Christian who wants to live faithful, even when it demands sacrifice of pleased freedoms or earthly provisions, always means compounding glory because God is the give of His reward.

APPL

- ? Are you saying "Yes" to anything that's causing or allowing you to say "No to God?"
 - o What's keeping you from setting God's reward as your defining motivation?

As long as God remains "lesser" in your heart and mind, the world's promise will always seem "greater". When God becomes greater in your heart and mind, the world doesn't diminish, it just disappears because it's incomparable.

Dare you ask yourself, "What is my reward for the way I'm living today?"

Are you living for a "reward" fully compensated today; that you can taste, touch, smell, hear, see, spend, consume, etc?
OR, Are you living for God's eternal reward?

- ? What do you need to say "No" to, so you can be ready to say "Yes" to God's greater reward for you?

God's Reward IS the Christian's defining motivation. God's reward is why you always give your FIRST and your ALL, and NEVER your last, least, little or lousy to God. God's Reward is why you should expend your life for faithfulness in God's mission and as a faithful witness. God rewards according to His nature and character. His reward is always greater than anything, and everything combined that this life has to offer; more glorious that you could imagine, more good than you conceived, greater than you expected and more generously than what you gave.

Until you trust that God's reward for your life is greater than any freedom or right of your life, you will always choose immediate satisfaction over eternal investment. Eternal investment doesn't only mean sacrifice of freedom or right, but it always includes it. [God's greater reward for our life can only become the defining motivation of our life when eternal reward consumes the center of our heart so that we stand ready to expend our lives for God's Kingdom glory.](#)

"NO" to freedom's pleasure or a "right" compensation entrusts your service to God's eternal reward. God never disappoints. Let God be your defining motivation for faithfulness.

Facet 2: The MANNER of faithful witness. .19-23

Paul states that he had no hesitations about his confidence in his Christian liberty. But, they were not his primary motivation and therefore did not determine his principle manner of gospel mission.

Paul uses a metaphor-driven explanation that describes his manner for winning people in gospel mission: "to the _____, I became like a _____. (Jew, under the law, outside the law, weak) Paul is careful to distinguish that he did not mean he became "just like" or identical to them. He couldn't, and wouldn't want to. To be a Jew meant that his primary relationship would be to the law of Moses. He was not "*under the law*", but under grace. (Rom 6:14) To be under the law would mean he had to satisfy the law in his flesh. Though not primarily bound by or under the law like, he conformed to it in instances so he would relate to and with those under it. He likely had the situation with Timothy needing to be circumcised in mind here. (Acts 16:1-3; 21:23-36) Those "*outside the law*" were Gentiles. This didn't mean he was "lawless", but rather under the "law of Christ". (Rom 7:22; Gal 6:2) Paul conformed to a Gentile way of life as long as it served him being able to win gentiles, and didn't oppose his service to God. He also served the "*weak*". He is likely referring back to 1 Cor 8 and his desire not to see them saved, but to serve them in their own sanctification and Christian growth and maturity. [Paul's manner](#)

for accomplishing mission meant doing whatever he had to do, at great sacrifice to self but never in sinfulness to God's commands, to win people to Christ through the gospel.

TRANS So, what did Paul mean by serving mission in this manner?

He provides a principle by which he lived his life to see people saved:

*"For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.
I have become all things to all people, so that I may be all means save some."*

Paul would not allow any personal preference, pleasure or even provision to hinder his service for gospel mission. There was no sacrifice that Paul was unwilling to make in order to preach and share the gospel with people. **Living for God's eternal reward means we understand that "free completely means servant intentionally"**.

ILLUS BEWARE Perversions of the principle: Many perversions of this principle have been propagated in order to do exactly what Paul is opposing here, to serve selfish desires. A sort of "the end justifies the means" type of mission strategy creates a perversion that allows a person, and churches, to entertain specific activities and reason that what it produces justifies the whackyness that it causes. It is usually reasoned in a way that the individual or church has established, but that is contrary to God's Word. Churches justify wacky "creativity" and individuals often justify sinful practice when they apply it this this perversion.

The missional manner of *"I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some."* has far more to do with a Christian's sacrifice of freedoms and rights, rather than a greater indulgence in them. After all, if our life is to display the gospel in the fullest manner possible, then it means we will lay down our lives, just as Christ laid down his life for us, freedoms, rights and all. Christians should be very careful that we do not fall prey to these perversions in our life. God doesn't ask us to do all we can to produce greater results for Him. **God commands that Christians surrender all to Him so He can work fully through all of who He created us to be for His glory.**

TRANS Finally, Paul moves to the third facet of his approach to faithful witness.

Facet 3: The MEASURE for faithful witness. .24-27

Paul's standard for personal faithfulness principally revolved around HOW he approached the mission; *"run that you may obtain it."* Paul's point is "HOW" you run the race. Winners run in a specific kind of way, even though their reward does not compare. **Christians live with an intentionality to demonstrate with their life what they believe about God, and His reward for their life.**

Self-control distinguishes between those who want to live for God, and those who live for self. Three main purposes are served by self-control. **First, self-control places a higher trust in God's commands and provisions that in personal ability.** Paul uses Greek word *agonizomai*, "Every athlete exercises", which means agonize or agony.

ILLUS Some may remember CBS' Wide World of Sports commercial that stated "the agony of defeat", just as a skier flew off a jump completely out of control and painfully slammed into the ground.

Self-control recognizes that the "race" Christians run will be hard. We cannot run this race, nor are we designed to, in our own strength. Running to win requires sacrifice, which only comes through self-control or discipline. But, which always brings spiritual power to run in such a way to receive God's reward. **Christians exercise self-control in order to live out of God's power to serve for God's reward.**

APPL Sacrifices should be made with intentionality toward growth and maturity. All faithfulness grows from maturity. Therefore, begin making sacrifices as led by Holy Spirit in three areas: in accordance to your conscience, in accordance with the people around you that are weak, struggling or enslaved, and in accordance with those God is calling you to reach.

Second, you train to receive the reward that will be given. The measure of the reward determines the intensity of training. We've already considered how worthy God's reward is for life. Self-discipline means that you surely will "want" to

indulge your freedoms and exercise your rights, but you intentionally “choose” NOT to so you can be a faithful witness and serve gospel mission.

Christians don't wait until a situation arises to implement sacrifices any more than a runner waits until race day to start running. Paul's measure of faithfulness was implemented thru sacrifice in training before people ever encountered him in person on mission.

Self-discipline enables a person to “span the distance” between indulged desires and enjoyed freedoms in order to sacrifice for gospel effectiveness and opportunity. Intentionality through self-discipline means we don't simply stop a freedom or forsake a right, but rather we forego our indulgence to remain focused on God's greater reward. Training always causes one to question its worth. But a worthy reward means the trial of training's intensity pales in comparison to the glory of the reward received. [God's reward makes any trial or test of the Christian life pale in comparison because of His great glory.](#)

Third, self-discipline is valued because it means the person remains qualified. Often times what begins as innocent indulgence ends in sinful enslavement. No one intends to end up this way, but find themselves caught before they realize it. Then, they've disqualified themselves by their own sin, or by causing others to stumble.

Self-discipline is also employed to encourage more growth of character. Many grow frustrated that they don't experience greater growth and maturity in their Christian life. Yet, they continue a free exercise of rights and indulgence of liberties. A sacrifice may not help an immediate situation, but it will never be wasted on increasing faithfulness. Sacrifices intentionally made for the sake of faithful witness or mission always serve to grow the person first, then the mission.

- ? Do you find yourself saying things like, “what harm could this cause?” MORE THAN you say “I don't want that to get in the way of my faithful witness. I want to be careful that my actions point others to Christ.”?

Christians sacrifice rights of liberty to serve for a greater reward in faithful witness.

CLOSE

- ? Christian, are you living to receive God's reward?
- ? Non-Christian, would you like to know how you can receive a reward greater than anything, and everything, that this world has to offer?