

“Sacrificial Freedom”

1 Cor 9:1-27

6.06.21

Dave Simmons in his book, *Dad, The Family Coach* wrote, “I took Helen (eight years old) and Brandon (five years old) to the Cloverleaf Mall in Hattiesburg to do a little shopping. As we drove up, we spotted a big sign that said, "Petting Zoo." The kids jumped up in a rush and asked, "Daddy, Daddy. Can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?"

"Sure," I said, flipping them both a quarter before walking into a store. They bolted away, and I felt free to take my time looking for a scroll saw. The petting zoo consists of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids pay the entrance fee and can stay in the enclosure petting the little critters while their moms and dads shop.

A few minutes later, I turned around and saw Helen walking along behind me. I was shocked to see she preferred the hardware department to the petting zoo. Recognizing my error, I bent down and asked her what was wrong.

She looked up at me with those giant brown eyes and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, it cost fifty cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing I ever heard. She repeated the family motto. The family motto is in "Love is Action!" She had given Brandon her quarter, and no one loves cuddly furry creatures more than Helen.

What do you think I did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as I finished my errands, I took Helen to the petting zoo. We stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. I had fifty cents burning a hole in my pocket; I never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it because she knew the whole family motto. It's not "Love is Action." It's "Love is SACRIFICIAL Action!"

Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. When you love, benefits accrue to another's account. Love is for you, not for me. Love gives; it doesn't grab. Helen gave her quarter to Brandon and wanted to follow through with her lesson. She knew she had to taste the sacrifice. She wanted to experience that total family motto. Love is sacrificial action.”

The Bible teaches that love is sacrificial action. One of the actions that was exhibited by many in the Bible was the sacrifice or giving up personal freedoms for the sake of others. Jesus sacrificed His freedom to choose His own will. Instead, He accepted His Father's will and went to the cross for God and for us.

Apostle Paul is another great example of sacrificing his freedom for others. He sacrificed his comfort for others. He sacrificed his future for others. He ultimately sacrificed his life for others. We have been studying 1 Corinthians for the past several weeks. This week we focus on chapter 9. It gives us examples of Paul's sacrificial freedom. Please turn with me to 1 Cor 9. We will read it as we go along.

Before we delve into chapter 9, it is important to know the context of chapter 8. Chapter 8 is about sacrificial love; sacrificial freedom. In chapter 8, Paul challenged the Corinthians to sacrifice their freedoms for the sake of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Some in the church were quite comfortable eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Others in the church, whom Paul called the weaker brother or sister could not imagine eating meat sacrificed to animals. Those who were free to eat this meat were becoming a stumbling block for the weak because they were flaunting their freedom in front of them.

Paul called out the ones who were eating meat in front of their weaker brothers and sisters. He said they were sinning against them.

Though Paul was free to eat meat sacrificed to idols, he chose to sacrifice his freedom around the weak to not cause his brother or sister to stumble.

Now, a very important word in chapter 9 used seven times in this chapter is the word “right.” It means “authority” or “power.” With authority or power of position comes privilege or freedom.

Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to forfeit their rights or freedom for the sake of other Christians. He wasn’t telling them something to do that he had not already been doing. Paul described his entire ministry as one of sacrifice and accommodation to others.

This morning we are going to look at four life principles from Paul’s life in 1 Cor 9 that are designed to motivate you to be willing to sacrifice your rights and freedom when called upon by God.

The first principle is:

Leaders will always have doubters. Or Skeptics.

Verse 1, “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”

Apostle Paul experienced many doubters over the years. It is one thing to have doubters from people that don’t know you. It is another thing to be doubted by people in the very churches you planted.

Some in the Corinthian church doubted Paul’s apostleship and authority. Some tried to disregard his authority so that they didn’t have to listen to him.

But Paul was an apostle. He met the qualifications. The qualifications of an apostle were: seeing the Lord Jesus; working signs, wonders, and miracles; and being

commissioned by God himself. In verse 1, Paul reminded them that he saw the Lord at his conversion. The Corinthians had seen him do signs and wonders when he first arrived. In verse 2, he explained more evidence- their lives had been transformed. They had trusted the message that Paul preached so they were the “seal” or proof of his apostleship. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:2 (NLT), “The only letter of recommendation we need is you yourselves. Your lives are a letter written in our hearts; everyone can read it and recognize our good work among you.”

If you are in any leadership you will have doubters. People feel comfortable being arm chair quarterbacks and question those in charge. It is so much easier to judge when you not in the place of leadership.

Deac Ryan is one our long-term members of Cornerstone Eldridge. Deac was a NS football and track coach. He is a member of their coaching Hall of Fame. Years ago, Deac’s son had a football game that lined up with his schedule so he would be able watch.

When Deac arrived, one of coaches came up to him and said they were missing a referee. If they could not find a ref they would have to cancel the game. Deac came to watch his son play, but ended up helping ref the game so that others could watch.

While he was volunteering his time, a father was loudly criticizing his calls. Deac stopped the game and walked over to the father and handed him the whistle and said, “If you don’t like how I ref you can take my place.” The surprised father said, “No, you go ahead and do it.”

It is a lot easier to criticize or doubt those in leadership when you are not in it.

The same goes for church leadership. Just because a church is made up of Christians doesn’t mean you will not have doubters. Doubters do not see all that you do behind

the scenes. Doubters don't know all the work and prayer and time that went into the decisions you make. Doubters don't see the freedoms you sacrifice in order to minister.

I often caution those who are thinking about going into church leadership. They will have doubters. They will receive negative feedback at some point. That is the nature of the job. However, don't let that stop you from serving the Lord. Don't let that stop you from making an impact. Don't let that stop you from getting opportunities to sacrifice freedoms for others.

A few wise words of advice for all of us. **Be slow to judge your leaders.** Give them the benefit of the doubt that they have thought through and prayed through the decisions that they make. And they had your wellbeing in mind when making the decisions.

Second, think of yourself being in their shoes. How would you like to be treated if you were in their position? Then do to them as you would like done to you.

The second principle is:

Leaders called to full-time ministry have the right to be financially supported.

Verse 3, "This is my defense to those who would examine me. ⁴ Do we not have the right to eat and drink? ⁵ Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? ⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?"

Paul gives a defense for his right to be paid by the Corinthians by using everyday examples to prove his case. A soldier doesn't pay his own expenses. Those he/she is protecting does. The vineyard planter gets to enjoy its grapes. A shepherd who tends the flock has a right to enjoy the milk of the animals. Those are human examples.

Paul then brings out the big Gun- God Himself to give a defense for his right be paid for his service. Verse 8, “Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? ¹² If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?”

The Old Testament law commanded that oxen not be muzzled when working on a threshing floor. On a threshing floor oxen were chained to a pole in the center and would walk around in circles separating the grain from the stalks with either their hooves or by pulling a heavy wooden structure that separated the grain from the stalks. God commanded that they be given the opportunity to eat while they labored. Grain for the oxen; grain for their masters.

From that OT passage, Paul emphasized that man is more important than beast so if God cared about the ox receiving grain for its labor, that meant that spiritual leaders should be cared for by the people they were serving.

He added the example of the Levites who served in the temple and around the altar. They were provided for by the people’s sacrifices.

All these examples prove that Paul had a right to be paid. Verse 14, “In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their **living** by the gospel.”

Leaders in full-time ministry have a right to be paid. There are many different full-time ministry positions that are not just Pastors. For example, missionaries, para-church positions, and other non-pastoral positions in the church.

There are great benefits to be supported by the church you serve. When a church pays your salary it allows you to focus on doing the ministry- whether in a church or on the mission field.

When a church pays you well enough you don't need to have another job which means you can be focused on ministry instead of thinking of ways to support your family.

There are also benefits for the church. For example, you got two servants for the price of one when you hired me back in 1998. You didn't just get me. You also received my wife. Andrea is a wonderful Pastor's wife and faithfully serves this church for free.

There are negatives to be supported by the church you serve. The Church determines what you are paid. If it is lower than what it costs to support your family then you are in a difficult situation. How can you earn more money to support your family if they are employing you to serve them full-time?

An unhealthy church can think they "own" you because they pay your salary. So you are expected to be at their beckon call. A Pastor friend of mine shared how a member of his church told him that he paid his salary so he needed to do what the guy wanted him to do.

An unhealthy church can pressure you to preach what they want to hear. Or they can pressure you from preaching what you feel called to speak about. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NLT), "For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will reject the truth and chase after myths."

I am grateful to be in a church that supports my family and doesn't have unhealthy expectations of me or my family or tells me what I should or should not preach.

Apostle Paul **sacrificed his right to be paid** from the church he was planting or preaching in at the time. 2 Corinthians 11:9 (ESV), "And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way."

He had two sources of income. He made tents that he sold and he was also supported by other believers.

The third principle we can learn is:

Christians sacrifice rights and freedoms for the sake of the gospel.

Verse 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."

Apostle Paul's philosophy of reaching people was to meet them where they were at so that he could win them to Christ. If he was engaging a Jewish person, he didn't flaunt His freedom in Christ. He didn't eat foods that were offensive to Jewish people. He utilized the Old Testament to speak about Christ.

When he spoke to Gentiles, though he was Jewish, he didn't flaunt his Jewishness. Instead, of saying no to certain foods, he ate what was served to him. He went into Gentile homes- though that was offensive to Jews. He loved them where they were at.

Regarding the weak. Keeping with the context of 1 Cor 8, we see the weak were those who could not eat meat sacrificed to animals. So Paul didn't eat meat around them. And he didn't put them down. Instead, he instructed them in the Lord so they could grow in spiritual maturity.

Though Paul was no longer under the cultural Laws of the Old Testament, he didn't break the moral laws in reaching others for Christ. He remained under the law of Christ at all times. "The law of Christ is the law that fulfills all laws: Galatians 5:14, "The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" It's the law that free people submit to gladly because they are led by the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:18, "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." Instead, you bear the fruit of love, and so submit gladly to the law of Christ, the law of love."

There is big difference in being all things to all people for the sake of the gospel and being all things for all people to be liked.

To be all things to all people in order to be liked sacrifices your true self. It allows others to determine who you are. It puts you in situations where you will cross the line and break the Law of Christ to fit in.

To be all things to all people for the sake of the gospel is being in control and not losing your true self. It is choosing to sacrifice some freedom and comfort in order to win people to Jesus Christ.

It means you might take up a hobby that you don't really enjoy to reach someone who loves that hobby.

It might mean spending extra time with someone who is not easy to be around.

It might mean eating foods that you do not enjoy in order to sit at the table with this person.

It might mean getting a negative reputation like Christ for hanging out with sinners.

It might mean frequenting the same restaurant instead of trying others in order to reach the waiter or waitress for Christ.

It might mean cleaning porta potties in order to serve others and provide opportunities to share the reason for the hope you have.

The fourth and final principle we can learn from this passage is:

Christians deprive themselves in order to receive the prize.

Verse 24, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

“The Corinthians loved athletics. They sponsored the biannual Isthmian Games, which were second in importance only to the Olympic Games. Paul was in Corinth in a.d. 50–52, so he would have been present for the Isthmian Games held in the spring of a.d. 51.

The games focused on six events: wrestling, jumping, javelin and discus throwing, and racing and boxing- the last two which Paul used for an analogy.

All runners have a common goal- to win the race. In order to win the race, they have to sacrifice much when training. They have to exercise self-control. When others are out enjoying the night life, they are in bed getting their rest. When others are enjoying all kinds of food, they are on a strict diet. When others are sleeping in, they are training.

Winners received crowns made from trees or plants. The point Paul makes is that they sacrifice so much for a crown that is temporal. It had a shelf life.

Paul exercised self-control. He sacrificed his freedoms in order to win the race. In Paul's final letter- written to Timothy he wrote, 2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NLT), "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. ⁸ And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing."

The Christian life is a marathon- not a sprint. The finish line is where you receive rewards and rest and honor by the Lord.

Everyone sacrifices in life. Whenever you have to make a choice you are sacrificing something. The key question to answer is: does what I am sacrificing for now have eternal value?

As we saw last week in 1 Cor 3, everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. How we live our life on earth will be judged. If we live for ourselves we will suffer loss.

If we made sacrifices and gave up our freedom for God we will be rewarded.

When you sacrifice rights and freedoms in this life for the gospel, you will be gaining something that has eternal value.

When you sacrifice rights and freedoms in this life for the building up of the Body of Christ you will be gaining something that has eternal value.

Does what I am giving my life for have eternal value? It is worth evaluating so that you can finish the race and be given the crown of victory by Jesus Himself.

Let's pray
o.b.g.