

1Corinthians 9:15-19 "Do You Serve God Under Compulsion? Paul Did."

1CO 9:14-16 "In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. 15 But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. 16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

What we're about to see this morning is a very unique look into the heart of Paul and the understanding he had regarding the salvation he received from Christ. Everything he did for the Lord comes from this understanding and his attitude about the commission he received from the living and risen Savior.

Now, keep in mind that Paul has been defining the rights of a leader in the church who shepherds the flock of Christ, and part of those rights includes receiving material blessings for the spiritual blessings he gives. That's where we left off last week.

1CO 9:14 "In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel."

But as Paul continues we're going to find that he will not receive his living from the gospel. In fact, he will lay that privilege aside. And the question has to be raised as to why he would do this. Does he do it to show up the other apostles who obviously were receiving their living by the gospel, according to Paul's own words?

Does he do it to, in essence, try and pay back his Lord and Savior for giving him eternal life? Does he do it simply so that no one will accuse him of making merchandise of the gospel? Or does he do it for other reasons?

Well, as we venture on we'll find an amazing reason for Paul's insistence not to make his living from the gospel. What we'll also see is that Paul does not expect any other minister of the gospel to follow his lead.

He is not setting a precedence here for other shepherds. In fact, as we've already seen he expects God's people, whom any shepherd

serves, to support that shepherd, according to Christ's own words; "the workman is worthy of his wages."

So, let's dig in and see if we can glean some things about Paul's life ambition and how we might learn some things for ourselves.

1CO 9:15 "But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast."

Paul is summing up now that, despite all of his teaching on the truth of God's word, "that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel", he makes it clear that he has not used any of these rights.

Why? Why Paul will you not submit to the Lord's clear teaching on this matter from where you will be supported? And he begins with a rather odd statement at the end of verse 15. "I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast."

Is he not being a bit over dramatic? Not at all. You see, for Paul, this was his way of exercising his freedom in Christ with the express purpose of making sure that our Lord's message of hope and freedom in the gospel would go forth unhampered as he gave no one the opportunity to use his life as an excuse not to receive the gospel.

Paul had a deep conviction about this. He wanted to be able to thank Jesus Christ with his life, not just with words. He knew that there were many false apostles and false prophets who made merchandise of the gospel. And this was a tangible way of showing the world that he was serious about his commitment to Christ and His gospel.

This is what he told the Ephesian elders when he went to encourage them in the work.

ACT 20:33-35 "I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul's desire to give came from his realization that Christ gave him all and held nothing back so that He might purchase Paul from eternal damnation.

This was Paul's boast. He would boast of Christ's love for him as he demonstrated his love for the Lord. And he would rather die than have someone accuse him of being in the ministry just for the money, as if the ministry was a wise career move.

Paul was an educated man. He could have gone far as a Pharisee. He could have gone far in any endeavor. Instead he chooses to pursue a path where he will not demand any money for services he renders to any particular church he serves.

Paul says, this is my boast. Now, again, he was not boasting in himself or in anything that would draw attention to himself. Rather, as we'll see, he does this for one reason and one reason only and that is to draw attention to Christ and see as many people as possible come to Christ in faith.

In fact, he goes on to say that as far as boasting is concerned it is not even found in his desire or ability to share the gospel. He certainly had shared the gospel with quite a few people. And he had seen his share of people come to Christ through his ministry. But he says this.

1CO 9:16 "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

Why can't Paul boast of the accomplishments the Lord has done in his life? Why can't he boast in all of the people who came to Christ through his ministry? Well, first he knows that he can't save anyone, that's a work of the Holy Spirit. But there's something deeper here for Paul. He understands that his call was not something he volunteered for after he came to faith in Christ.

This is what he means when he says that I am compelled to preach. A more literal rendering of this passage is, "for necessity is laid on me." This is why the NASB uses the phrase, "for I am under compulsion."

The idea here is that someone has put this burden on him. And because someone has laid this on him, he doesn't have a choice. Well, how can this be? I thought we all had a choice. I didn't think we should ever serve under compulsion. This is what Peter alludes to in his first epistle.

1PE 5:2 "shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;..."
(NASB)

Paul even alludes to this himself when writing to his friend Philemon regarding the keeping of his slave Onesimus as a brother in Christ who would be useful to Paul.

PHM 1:14 "but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be as it were by compulsion but of your own free will."

So, how is that Paul can say that when it comes to preaching the gospel, he is under compulsion?

Keep in mind that Paul is not talking about being an apostle or preaching the gospel in a way where he does it begrudgingly. He is not traveling all over the world and putting his life in danger because someone is holding a gun to his head. He does it because of his deep love for Christ and an appreciation for the salvation he's been given.

But there is a sense, at least from Paul's perspective, that he did not choose this task as if one day he came to Christ and asked to be an apostle and a bearer of good news to the world.

Remember, Paul was on his way to Damascus to persecute the church, not to advance its cause, when the Lord Jesus stopped him in his tracks and gave him his task as He gave Paul the gift of eternal life.

This is what Paul is recounting. He is saying that in one sense I was not being an obedient servant looking to promote Christ. I was given a task I couldn't refuse. How do you refuse the living God who says, "you will do this for Me"?

Paul was not looking for Christ when the Lord sought him. But, in accepting that new life, Paul then realized that he was now under the leadership of his new master and when given an order he knew he could not say no.

This was not a matter of Paul coming to Christ after he received this grace and life and asking the Lord for the opportunity to now serve. Along with Paul's new life in Christ came immediate orders according to the will of God.

In this sense Paul is right when he says, "I am under compulsion. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel."

He is admitting that along with the gift comes the awesome responsibility to obey the Lord. And by the way, Paul means this when he says, "woe to me if I do not preach the gospel."

Again, this is not something Paul did because his motivation was to avoid being squashed by God if he chose not to preach the gospel, though he realized that there would be consequences for disobeying a direct order from God.

He is saying, woe to me, because though he may have been under compulsion in one sense, his renewed mind and his new life and nature now knew that there was no turning back. He now had a compulsion from within which could not do anything less than serve Christ whole-heartedly.

This is not unlike some of the prophets of old who had been called by God to serve Him by telling the nation of Israel the will of God; prophets like Jeremiah and Amos.

JER 20:9 "But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."

AMO 3:8 "The lion has roared - who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken - who can but prophesy?"

This is Paul. He is under a renewed spiritual compulsion to preach the gospel because it is now part of his life. This isn't simply a script he's been given to read as though he were parroting the good news of Jesus Christ. He cannot do anything but give it away because of his great love for the Lord and realizing the task has been given to him from God Almighty. How do you say no to Him?

Paul couldn't say no. Paul couldn't look at his life outside of Christ and compare it to what he now has in Christ and decide that when he got around to it he would go forward with the Lord. He took this gift seriously, because he knew the seriousness of not giving himself with all devotion to the task at hand.

ACT 18:5 "When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ."

"Woe to me if I don't preach the gospel", woe to me if I neglect my call and my responsibility to the world and above all to my Savior who called me to so great a salvation. This is what Paul is expressing.

But how is Paul different from any of us? Did we deserve salvation more than Paul? Are we exempt from being devoted to the gospel simply because our call is not the same as Paul's?

How many of us have ever said, woe to me if I don't preach the gospel?, or woe to me if I don't use the gifts Christ has given me?, or woe to me if I don't help to promote the peace and unity and the furtherance of His kingdom in the local body in which He's placed me?

Paul is simply saying that his ministry is his and he will pursue it with the understanding that God Himself placed him in it; not unlike how God has done that in every one of our lives. It's all a matter of perspective. And for Paul he had the proper perspective; an eternal perspective which did not allow the temporal cares of this world to stand in the way of that task.

But he can't boast in that. And he won't. Notice how he explains his reasoning in the next verse.

1CO 9:17 "If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me."

This is what I touched on earlier when I said that from Paul's perspective he did not come to Christ after his conversion and volunteer to be an apostle. If he had volunteered, from a human stand-point, he could have a reward for doing something which was as unto the Lord. It would have been one of those works which he describes earlier in this letter as being of the type of gold, silver or costly stones.

But he realizes in his case that Christ volunteered him. He didn't have a say in one sense. Now, someone might take offense at that and grumble that God might force us to do something. But if it is God who commands us to do a task for Him how can that be bad? And, is God not allowed to command those who are now part of His Army?

Paul certainly isn't grumbling. He's simply stating a fact. He says, "Christ came to me and gave me life and then gave me orders to be an apostle to the Gentile world." How does he get a reward for choosing to be an apostle, when he never chose to be an apostle, is all Paul is saying.

And so for him, since this was not a voluntary position, he can't claim a reward for choosing it; rather he is simply discharging the trust committed to him by Christ. It would be like us going to work

and doing the job we've been given. We get compensated in terms of wages, but we don't get rewards and bonuses simply for showing up and doing what is expected of us.

And by the way, this is one of the reasons Paul doesn't demand money from the Corinthians or any other church he personally serves. He is saying that if he had chosen to do this he would have the right and the privilege to receive material compensation from the Corinthians. But under the circumstances he does not feel compelled to receive from them. He's only doing what was expected of him.

And so, if the Corinthians won't support him then the God who chose him will, because the God who chose him and saved him gave him the orders and will provide the means to carry out the task.

Now, it might be argued that none of us really chooses our position in Christ. None of us can determine what gifts we receive from the Holy Spirit. None of us are worthy to be part of the Kingdom of God. And so, none of us can claim a bonus for doing what has been given to us as a gift. And we would be right.

But the point Paul is making is that since his life is of such a high profile type, and that the world places him under a microscope, he feels under compulsion to serve the Lord with no pretenses to receive special attention, and he's willing to give up certain things so as to not draw attention to himself while lifting up Christ in everything.

This is meant to be a message to the church in Corinth where certain members are demanding that they be able to practice their rights in Christ while doing it in an atmosphere of bringing attention to themselves while the world looks on and wonders what these selfish people are all about.

Paul is trying to teach them, and us, that while we may have certain rights in Christ are we going to let such privileges get in the way of the bigger task of promoting the gospel and going forward with the work Christ has commanded each individual in the body to accomplish for Him, so that the body might be built up?

Or are we going to be preoccupied with our own individual lives and demand that we have the right not to serve Christ at any particular time because we have that choice also? Paul had the

choice not to go where Christ asked him to go, at least from a human free-will stand point.

But he has made it clear that if we see this kingdom of God through the eyes of Christ, and we put it into an eternal perspective, then we will begin to see that we too are under compulsion, that we too really have only one choice and that is to accomplish the task that our Lord has for us in extending His kingdom.

And as we begin to ponder this new life, and as we begin to seek the Lord and devote our lives to Him, not just in words, but in real commitment, then we're going to find ourselves saying with Jeremiah, "his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."

That's where Paul was and that's where our Lord wants all of us. Now, granted this is not the message we hear from most pulpits today. And I'm certainly not claiming to have it all together myself when it comes to having this attitude. But, it is curious that often when the people of God in the church-at-large are challenged in this way, few are willing to take up the banner.

It just seems easier to sit in the pew and say, "I've shown up for work and I've done the least that's required of me. I'll take my wages for that and am not interested in any additional rewards since that would take a lot more effort."

To that Paul would say, you are obviously not under compulsion because you don't seem to realize from what you've been delivered, and how that should show itself with gratitude in a way where our lives are no longer ours but the Lord's, who says, love Me with all your heart, soul and mind. That sounds like He wants all of us, not just a small piece.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to push anyone into any work or ministry or service for the Lord by trying to make anyone feel guilty. I'm just trying to give us God's perspective on what it means to be purchased and thankful for this new life, as was Paul.

Paul is not meant to be the exception with a life devoted to Christ. He's meant to be the norm. And so, when we look at our lives most of us might say, "I certainly don't measure up to Paul, let alone Christ, and so what's the point in trying?"

It's not a matter of trying. It's a matter of loving. It's a matter of loving the Lord enough to come to Him and seek His face, and if

we don't have those desires to be a flame for Christ, to ask that we might receive those desires from Him and then see what God does as we obey Him.

For Paul, it was a matter of realizing that he could best serve as he became a slave to the world, being Christ's bondservant.

1CO 9:19 "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible."

Paul belonged to no man in the sense that he was obligated to men because of something he owed them. We've all heard of politicians being "bought". And what that means is that if I receive a sum of money or favors from someone as a politician, then I feel obligated to pursue their special interests.

Money or favors have been exchanged to where I now owe that person what he wants from me. In a sense it's like being held hostage. Some might compare it to taking money from organized crime. When they want a favor, you better believe you'll be obligated to do their bidding.

Paul is saying that the only bidding I do is that of my Lord and Savior. And because he demanded no money from those churches he served, no one could ever accuse him of serving because of special interests in that church.

Now, this was not done by Paul so as to make it look like someone in the church was going to hold him hostage in a spiritual sense. As we'll see, Paul did this for the benefit of the unbelieving world. He was doing this so as to better approach the unbelieving world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's why he says, "I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible."

Though Paul did not volunteer himself to his apostolic office, he did volunteer himself not to take material blessings for spiritual blessings he gave. He did volunteer himself to be a slave to all men.

Most people in their right minds would not volunteer to enter into slavery. Paul did. This was his reward. Though he could not claim a reward for doing what Christ called him to do, he could claim a reward for doing it in a way that didn't allow the world to accuse him of being in it for the money, or any other selfish reason.

1CO 9:18 "What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it."

What is our reward? Do we see it simply as something we get for having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, or do we see it as becoming a slave of Christ? Do we see the reward as only being forgiven of sin and having a place in heaven, or do we see it as the privilege of serving Christ in His body to the advancement of the kingdom of God?

Paul was a free man in Christ because he was Christ's slave. But he was a man under compulsion as he made himself a slave to men to serve them and bring them the gospel. We too are free people in Christ. But, we are also Christ's slaves and therefore have the privilege of making ourselves slaves to men.

GAL 5:13 "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

How do we serve one another in love? We start by loving God above all. How do we love God above all? We start by not thinking that we have rights to be free from responsibility to Him as slaves and messengers. We put our salvation into an eternal perspective by realizing that outside of Christ we would be lost forever.

And now that we have life eternal we start considering others who don't know Him. God has already given us the task. He's just desiring that we be available. And as we are, He'll open the doors and prepare the hearts. We have liberties and rights in Christ, but none of them include opting out of being slaves for His sake and glory.

Paul's example was the Lord Jesus Himself when it came to being a viable part of the kingdom of God.

MAT 20:26 -28 "...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

May we give our lives for each other and may we give our lives, as did Paul, for the lost of this world. To become a slave is to become rich and heirs and wise in the kingdom of God.