

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:12b-18

Title: Waiving Your Rights

Truth: Proclaiming the gospel is worth sacrifice.

Date/Location: Sunday August 30, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

After all that Paul said to defend his apostleship and rights as an apostle, he explains that he decided not to demand those rights. He not only voluntarily relinquished his *liberty* so as not to unnecessarily offend a brother; but he also set aside his *rights* for the sake of the gospel.

As we study this passage, we need to drink in that idea. Namely, as servants of God, it is not “our” rights that we demand. It is not “our” man (favorite preacher), “our” time, “our” things, “our” desires, and so forth. In every case, it is God’s interests that should override everything.

It is like you might waive your right to an attorney (generally not recommended) or like you might waive your right to review recommendation letters (generally recommended). Similarly, we must learn what it means to waive even our God-given rights if it will promote the ministry of the gospel. The forbearance and patience that this takes in less-than-ideal circumstances must be tremendous and difficult. Yet it is important.

III. Paul Does not Use Those Rights, v. 12b-14

- A. Paul has the right to financial support. This is the argument of verses 3-12a. But he does not use it – “nevertheless we have not used this right.”
- B. Instead of benefiting from the right of support, he endures the difficulties of supporting himself. The implications of this are notable to his weekly schedule, as they would be for any minister that has to work on the side to support himself. The New Testament gives ample evidence of this.

1 Thess 2:9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

2 Thess. 3:8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,

Act 18:3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.

Act 20:34 "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.

1 Cor 4:12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure.

Eph 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

C. Why did he do this? Why not just take support? Or, alternatively, why not quit the ministry so he did not have to do both job and ministry? He explains with a negative purpose statement. The word "lest" means "so that not" and you see some form of that in the CSB, NAS, and NET translations. I think the idea is a little stronger than "rather" or "instead." To Paul, Hindering the gospel is *not an option*. He thought it wrong to choose a compromising way out that *would* hinder the gospel, at least in the ministry contexts in which he found himself.

In the North American context, a pastor or missionary taking financial support is not a hindrance to the gospel at all in the eyes of the church people that are donating to provide support. In fact, if one does not take support, it may be looked upon as unwise in some contexts.

But notice that churches support the minister so that he does not have to seek funds in his field of service—and thus he does not need to work a side job or seek financial support from those to whom he ministers. Being as yet unsaved, or with a cynical mindset about so-called churchmen who have come through their town before, they may be suspicious of anyone who asks for financial support. Furthermore, we believe it is not right to seek support from those who are outside of the family of God. We exist to serve them, not they us.

It is possible to abuse/misuse your right. Some Corinthians thought by merely using it he *was* abusing it. Use might be viewed as misuse, which would hinder the gospel, which Paul wants to avoid "at all costs."

D. Verse 13-14 provide another example demonstrating the truth of Paul's rights. Remember before we saw the illustrations of a soldier, a farmer, a shepherd, and oxen. This new illustration is of the Old Testament priests. Their ministry ran from Exodus through Malachi, and even some into the New Testament era until Herod's temple was destroyed by the Romans.

1. The priests and Levites were supported by the meat and grain offerings. Perhaps this fact is lost on some readers when they think of the sacrifice being brought to the temple and being burned up

completely. Not all of it was burned up completely. Some was eaten by the Levites; other parts were consumed by the common people who made the offering. See Leviticus 6:14-18 for example (and Lev. 6:29, 7:6, 8:31; Num. 18:10). This is something like what we encountered in 1 Corinthians 8 with the meat offered to idols and eaten in the idol's temple. Only in this case, it was meat offered to the true God and eaten in the temple of the true God.

2. In the same way, verse 14 argues, the Lord commands that those who preach the gospel should receive their "living" from it. This is the normal pattern for today. In some way, the spiritual provision of the gospel should be remunerated by the physical provision of finances, food, shelter, clothing, and the like. Unpaid elders or missionaries is *not* the normal pattern. Remember Luke 10:7 from our Lord.

E. By the way, not taking money also frees the minister to give the true message without "shading it" or "changing it" to suit the ears of the audience. When "churches" pay their ministers, this is a temptation on both sides of the paycheck. For the minister, he does not want to lose his job. For the congregation, they want to "get what they pay for." If they have itching ears (2 Tim. 4:3) this means they want to hear a message fashioned to their tastes instead of to God's taste.

2 Tim. 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers...

IV. Paul's Reward, v. 15-18

A. Once again Paul expresses that he did not use his rights as an apostle. But someone might claim that he was cleverly using some "reverse psychology" on his readers and trying to shame them into responding with what he *really* wanted, which was the financial support!

B. To counter this objection, he plainly states: "I have not written these things that thus it would be done for me." Obviously, he feels very strongly about this because he expresses that he would rather die than have his reason for boast taken away. Paul is not lying, friends, for none of his words in Scripture, which are God's words as well, could be lies, for God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

C. Besides the reason already stated—that he does not want to hinder the progress of the gospel—there is another reason why he chooses to serve God this way. Serving free of charge, so to speak, is the thing that sets

apart his ministry from mere faithful stewardship. It is the thing in which he rejoices (“my boasting”).

“Reward” could be thought of in two ways which I believe are inter-related. He could be thinking of heavenly reward for his service. But also, “reward” is close to the idea of “pay.” Verse 18 speaks of his reward as presenting the gospel without charge, i.e. without pay. So, the “pay” is “no pay.” The reward is first something he experiences in time—that he can rejoice over being able to minister without charge. But that undoubtedly results in an eternal reward for service well done for the Lord.

This method had costs. Exhaustion (1 Thess. 2:9) was one. Another was that Paul was looked down upon by others in “high society” for working with his hands. This was typical in that culture, as it is in some modern cultures or subcultures.

Note next the requirement that was laid upon Paul, and then how he has chosen to carry it out willingly.

- D. The requirement, v. 16. In preaching Christ, there is nothing to boast about, because Christ assigned him to the task. He was directly commanded to do it. That is his life mission. Do you remember passages in which that commission was given: Acts 26:13-20, Romans 1:14?

Rom. 1:14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.

Paul then says, “woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” This is *not* the feeling of a pietistic or mystical minister of the gospel who “feels” called to ministry. In other words, it is not the internal feeling that someone talks about when they say they “I am compelled to preach the gospel” or “His Word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones” (Jer. 20:9).

This is a statement of divine judgment of a man who saw Jesus and was told what to do. If he disobeys, he is toast. That is what “woe” means. Notice the woes of the prophets toward others (Isaiah 3:11), toward themselves (Isaiah 6:5), and the pronouncements of Jesus (Matthew 23:13 and seven other times in the chapter). *That* is what Paul is saying about himself. If he does not preach Christ, he is in trouble. Today’s preacher does not have *that kind* of calling.

Isa. 3:11 **Woe** to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, For the reward of his hands shall be given him.

Isa. 6:5 So I said: "**Woe** is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

Matt. 23:13 "But **woe** to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

E. Now, we turn to Paul's attitude. He took the command to preach not as a burden, but as a delight. He willingly embraced it. (By the way, that makes all the difference in an assigned task, doesn't it?) If you just do the work to get it done and grumble all the way, there is no reward in that. You are just doing what you are told in a minimalistic fashion. But if you do the job willingly, heartily as to the Lord, then there can be reward. If you do so against your will, then you still must carry out what you are assigned.

So, what is the reward, Paul asks? It is specifically this: that when he preaches, he can not only do what the Lord commanded, *but also* give the gospel for free to everyone he encounters. That is something to rejoice about.

This way also he keeps far away from abusing his rights in the gospel. How different is his attitude than the minister who is greedy for money (1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7).

1 Tim. 3:3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;

Titus 1:7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money

Conclusion

Paul's situation is not exactly applicable today, for he was an apostle, not a regular pastor. The "necessity laid upon" him was that Christ had personally told him to minister the gospel. His was no merely internal compulsion to preach or subjective call. It was completely objective, and if he did not, it was "woe" for him.

But his attitude is nevertheless instructive for us. Ministers today have no problem with the command that those who preach the gospel should get their living from the gospel. What is more difficult is practicing Paul's attitude of "I won't demand my rights." When it comes to pay, if some

ministers did not get paid, they would quit. All would find it far more difficult to minister, and some ministry would be left undone.

But I think the point is more about the attitude. We have rights, but are we willing to give them up theoretically and even in practice when needed to advance God's work? Or are we more about "me" than "HE"? Is the gospel important enough to make us willing to endure hardship and inconvenience for its sake? Is it important enough that we do not mind being reviled, or mischaracterized, or less well off because of it?

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