

1 CORINTHIANS 9:16-27
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1 Corinthians 9:16-18. Nothing to boast about

16. For if I preach the Good News, I have nothing to boast about; for necessity is laid on me; but woe is to me, if I don't preach the Good News. 17. For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward. But if not of my own will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. 18. What then is my reward? That, when I preach the Good News, I may present the Good News of Christ without charge, so as not to abuse my authority in the Good News.

16. “For if I preach the Good News, I have nothing to boast about; for necessity is laid on me; but woe is to me, if I don’t preach the Good News

This is like the story of Jonah. God called to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh and Jonah tried to run away.

Paul, like Jonah, is under obligation—an obligation imposed on him by God. He doesn’t deserve praise for doing what he has to do. He would, however, deserve criticism (woe) if he did otherwise.

17. “For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward. But if not of my own will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me

Paul outlines two possibilities:

1. He can proclaim the gospel voluntarily. He could expect a reward. So far Paul has refused compensation for his services..
2. However, if he proclaims the gospel not of his own free will, then he is like a steward the manager of a household. In that culture, stewards were often slaves entrusted with significant responsibilities.

18. “What then is my reward? That, when I preach the Good News, I may present the Good News of Christ without charge, so as not to abuse my authority in the Good News

Paul’s reward is the pleasure of making the gospel free of charge
 the joy of making something valuable available to people free of charge
 the satisfaction being committed to a high calling rather than to the exercise of his rights

By refusing to exercise his rights, he has avoided putting obstacles in the way of the gospel

1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Although free, I brought myself under bondage

19. For though I was free from all, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more. 20. To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain those who are under the law; 21. to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law. 22. To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. 23 Now I do this for the sake of the Good News, that I may be a joint partaker of it.

19. “For though I was free from all, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more

NOTE: In verses 19-23, Paul explains his behavior, which to me seems inconsistent in that his behavior varies according to the company in which he finds himself. Here is a little extra information to help us get Paul through his quandary...

For example, Paul concluded the last chapter by saying, “Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will eat no meat forevermore, that I don’t cause my brother to stumble” (8:13).

He began this chapter by asking, “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Haven’t I seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Aren’t you my work in the Lord?” (9:1).

These four questions expect a “Yes!” answer. As noted above, in verses 3-15, he talked about his willing sacrifice of certain rights, particularly the right to be married (v. 5) and the right to require payment for his services as an apostle.

Now he says that, even though he is free—free to all—he has chosen to make himself a slave—a slave to all. In verses 20-22, he will explain exactly what he means by “slave to all.” He has become a slave to Jews by becoming a Jew—and a slave to those “under the law”—and a slave to those “who are without law”—and a slave to the weak. He has done so to eliminate barriers that might hinder his winning people to Christ.

Your thoughts?

20. “To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain those who are under the law

In verses 20-22, Paul mentions Jews, those under the law, those outside the law, and the weak.

We have been discussing the distinct groups.

- “Jews” as non-Christian Jews
- “those under the law” as Christian Jews.
- “those who are without law” as non-Christian Gentiles and
- “the weak” as Christian Gentiles (Holladay, 96).

20a. “To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews

Keep in mind that Paul is a Jew.

- He was “circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:5-6).
- However, Christ revealed himself to Saul (as he was then known) on the road to Damascus, and he became a Christian—a Jewish Christian (Acts 9:1-19; see also Galatians 1:15-17).

21. “to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law

As we just discussed in verse 20, “those outside the law” are Gentiles, and Paul is known as the great missionary to the Gentiles.

- The risen Christ personally gave Paul this mission, telling Paul, “Depart, for I will send you out far from here to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21)
- Paul observed that he “had been entrusted with the Good News for the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the Good News for the circumcision” (Galatians 2:7).

22a. “To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak

The weak are either

- Christian Gentiles
- or all Gentiles
- or new inexperienced Christians

22b. “I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some

Paul’s flexibility would not extend to behavior or teachings incompatible with the gospel.

I think it is likely he could extend himself as far as possible to fit in with as many people as possible...“that I may by all means save some.”

23. “Now I do this for the sake of the Good News, that I may be a joint partaker of it

This verse reminds us that the God who has been so faithful to us expects faithfulness in return. God has given Paul a mission to proclaim the gospel, and Paul must do that to share in the blessings of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Run that you may win!

24. Don’t you know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run like that, that you may win. 25. Every man who strives in the games exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. 26. I therefore run like that, as not uncertainly. I fight like that, as not beating the air, 27. but I beat my body and bring it into submission, lest by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.

24a. “Don’t you know that those who run in a race all run

Paul introduces an athletic metaphor to illustrate his point. Just as runners in a footrace must practice certain disciplines to make it possible for them to win a race, Christians have to practice certain disciplines to make it possible for them to win the spiritual prize.

24b. “but one receives the prize?

In an athletic contest, only one person can win first prize, but athletics often provide lesser prizes as well. Nevertheless, the second-place winner usually feels more like a loser than a winner, because first place was the goal.

I will brag a little in this part of the study....I apologize in advance.

24c. “Run like that, that you may win

Paul emphasizes running the spiritual race in such a way as to win the spiritual prize. That raises the question of works versus grace. Can we win salvation by our own efforts—by applying spiritual disciplines?

25a. “Every man who strives in the games exercises self-control in all things

What disciplines do we need to observe to win the spiritual prize?

- Traditional Christian disciplines include Bible reading, prayer, and fasting.
- Jesus emphasized feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty something to drink, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, and visiting the prisoner (Matthew 25:31-46).

25b. “Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible

- Have you noticed that the trophies or Super Bowl rings or Oscars acknowledge big winners have intrinsic monetary value
- In Paul’s day, winners of athletic contests received wreaths of laurel branches, olive branches, or celery. Those prizes had no intrinsic monetary value, but competitors prized them for the same reason that football players prize a Super Bowl ring.

26a. “I therefore run like that, as not uncertainly

But Paul doesn’t run aimlessly. God has called him to proclaim the Gospel, and he does so tirelessly. I admire his tenacity.

26b. “I fight like that, as not beating the air

This is a parallel metaphor to “run aimlessly.”

27a. “but I beat my body and bring it into submission

The Greek words make this more complicated and confusing in the commentaries. I think it has to do with subduing a person’s passions.

Your thoughts?

27b. “lest by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected

I think there is an irony in this scripture based on the “Saul” in Paul. Now proclaiming the Gospel while living a life that would disqualify him for a spiritual prize. My best guess.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine on you
and be gracious to you
and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26