

PAUL'S PASSION FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL

TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 9:19-27

INTRODUCTION:

1. The apostle Paul preached the gospel out of necessity. In verse 16, Paul said, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"
2. Paul knew that his life would be miserable if he did not preach the Gospel.
3. Tonight, we will pick up at verse 19, and will look at Paul's passion for preaching the Gospel.

- I. PAUL'S METHOD IN PREACHING
- II. PAUL'S MOTIVE IN PREACHING
- III. PAUL'S PURPOSE IN PREACHING

I. PAUL'S METHOD IN PREACHING

1. Paul was an excellent preacher. Paul understood his audience, whether they were Jews or Gentiles. Acts 9:22 says, Paul "confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ."
2. When Paul preached to the Greeks on Mars Hill, he said, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:22, 23).
3. Paul could preach to anyone, anywhere. "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor. 9:22).
4. Paul had a very interesting background. He was born a Jew ("a Hebrew of the Hebrews" – Philippians 3:5), and he was raised as a strict Pharisee.
5. Paul was born with Roman citizenship. In Acts 22:28, the chief captain said to Paul, "With a great sum obtained I this freedom," and Paul said to the chief captain, "But I was free born."
6. Paul was well-educated. He was comfortable around intellectuals, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, slaves and slave owners, soldiers and sailors, kings and governors, like Felix and Festus and King Agrippa, as well as his fellow tent-makers.
7. Paul spent time in prison, so he was at home with criminals and with prison wardens.
8. John Phillips said they "were all the same to Paul – people for whom Christ died. There was no social barrier he recognized. He moved with

ease in all strata of society, nobody's slave, yet everybody's slave"
(*Exploring 1 Corinthians*).

9. In his zeal to win souls, Paul says in verse 19, "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all..."
10. Paul was at their service, without reward or hire – that he might be the means of saving more souls.
11. Paul does not mean that he literally became a slave. But this does mean that he made many sacrifices in order to win souls.
12. Incidentally, many Christians did literally become slaves in order to win souls. *Barnes' Notes* says, "It is said that not a few early Christians, in illustration of this principle of conduct, actually sold themselves into slavery in order that they might have access to and benefit slaves – an act to which nothing would prompt a man but the religion of the cross."
13. And it wasn't just Christians in the apostolic era who did this. Johann Leonhard Dober and David Nitschmann were two young Moravian Brethren missionaries from Germany who were called in 1732 to minister to the African slaves on the Caribbean islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix.
14. There is some debate over the details, but some biographers say that when the two men were told that they would not be allowed to live among the slaves, Dober and Nitschmann sold themselves to a slave owner and boarded a ship bound for the West Indies.

15. In verse 20, Paul says that in order to win Jews to Christ, he "became as a Jew." In other words, he complied with their rites and customs as far as he could without compromising his Christian convictions.
16. There are several examples of this in the Bible. In Acts 16:3, we see that Paul took Timothy and circumcised him "because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek."
17. Then in Acts 18:18, we see that when Paul was in Cenchrea, he had taken a vow and had his hair cut off. There is reason to think that Paul made this vow in an effort to convince the Jews that he did not despise the law of Moses, and that he was not their enemy (cf. Acts 21:18-24).
18. Albert Barnes says, Paul might have made this vow, "in order to conciliate them, and to mitigate their anger against the gospel" (*Barnes' Notes*).
19. Paul was under no obligation but he went along with their proposal in an effort to advance the Gospel (Acts 21:18-26; cf. I Cor. 9:20).
20. The phrase, "under the law" (9:20, 21) refers to the law of Moses. Paul conformed to their rites and customs as far as he could without compromising his Christian faith.

21. Paul submitted himself to the Jewish laws, and lived in conformity with them as best as he could without denying the Gospel.
22. “To them that are without law” (9:21) refers to Gentiles, who did not have the law of Moses. To the Jews and Gentiles alike, Paul preached the Gospel.
23. The law of Christ (9:21) is a higher and holier law than the law of Moses.
24. The “law of Christ” (cf. Galatians 6:2) is also referred to as “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25), “the royal law” (Jam. 2:8), and “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2).
25. The “law of Christ” is the code of commandments under which Christians live.
26. “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak” (9:22; cf. 8:7, 9, 10, 11, and 12) refers to those who have a weak conscience, or are weak in faith, or are overly-scrupulous in regard to certain religious observances.
27. *Barnes’ Notes* says, “And their conscience being weak” (8:7b) means, “Being unenlightened on this subject.”

II. PAUL’S MOTIVE IN PREACHING

1. Paul’s motive was obvious – “that I might by all means save some” (9:22b).
2. Paul’s desire was to win as many people to Christ as possible. “Gain” (9:19, 20, 21, 22) in this context means, “win to Christ.”
3. Paul wanted to be a “partaker” with them of their joy and happiness (9:23).
4. This is a great theme in Paul’s epistles.
 - “that my joy is the joy of you all” (II Cor. 2:3)
 - “For ye are our glory and joy.” (I Thess. 2:20)
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III. PAUL’S PURPOSE IN PREACHING (9:24-27)

1. In I Corinthians 9:27, Paul says he did not want to be a “castaway,” that is, disqualified or disapproved. Paul was concerned that through carelessness he might slip up, and yield to the sins of the flesh. And then he would be a “castaway,” i.e., disqualified and disapproved.
2. The Christian life is a life of discipline (I Cor. 9:24-27). The Christian life is not always easy.

3. Paul understood there are great temptations in the Christian life. Most of our temptations come by way of the flesh; that's why Paul says, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection..." (9:27).

4. The Christian life is a life of temperance and discipline. "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things" (9:25).

5. The Greek word translated "striveth" is *agoniz-omai*. It is where we get our English word "agonize."

6. Athletes push themselves; they exert themselves; they run and work out for many hours a day. They endure vigorous training. Athletes deny themselves in order to win their prizes. They abstain from certain foods. They will not drink soda or sugary beverages. They exercise and work out continually. They keep at it.

7. And they do all that for some worldly trophy or worldly crown that will someday fall apart (9:25).

8. Harry Ironside said, "Let us take a lesson from the athlete and be willing to give up present pleasures for future glory."

9. Those who would excel for God must not give in to the flesh. Yielding to sin means losing your testimony and losing your reward.

10. Second John 8 says, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."

11. These Scriptures deal with rewards in heaven, not eternal salvation. Salvation is a free gift, but rewards are earned (I Cor. 9:24, 25; cf. 3:12-15).

12. Some Christians have been saved for quite some time, but have not earned much of anything!

CONCLUSION:

1. Thousands of people came to Corinth for their popular athletic games.
2. Paul says, "know ye not" (9:24), meaning that the games to which he alludes, were well known to them.
3. The Christians in Corinth were very familiar with the various competitions (horse and foot races, boxing, etc.), and with how they were conducted.

4. The games were celebrated with extraordinary pomp and splendor. And this is Paul's point – many men would compete, but only one would receive the prize (9:24).
5. All Christians will stand at the judgment seat of Christ, but not all will be rewarded.
6. First John 2:28 says, “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”
7. Why will some believers be “ashamed” when the Lord returns? Because they will be “castaways” – i.e., disapproved and disqualified.
8. They will lose their reward (I Cor. 9:27).