

**I Corinthians Lesson # 21**  
**Method and Rewards of True Ministry**  
**Pentwater Bible Church**  
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*1 Corinthians 9:19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.*

Paul's goals were to glorify God completely and not have any earthly endeavor shackle him. Further, he had not shackled the exercise of his rights in the area of food and drink alone; so that though he was free he voluntarily became a slave (cf. Phil. 2:6-7) for the good of others (1 Cor. 10:33) whom he wanted to win (9:22). The freedom from anything in the world enabled him to conduct the Lord's business free of any philosophical or material position, which would be an entanglement to the work that God had in store for him.

*1 Corinthians 9: 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;*

Though Paul was primarily an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:8), he never lost his love for the salvation of his own people (Rom. 9:3). He made it his custom to seek out the synagogue in each town he entered (Acts 17:2) in order to win the Jews (Rom. 1:16). In fact chapters nine, ten and eleven of the Book of Romans are written specifically to the Jews. This does not mean that he went back to keeping the Mosaic Law as a doctrinal practice. No verse points out more starkly Paul's own consciousness of what he was, both before and after meeting Christ. Before, he was the Jew's Jew, faultless with regard to legalistic righteousness (Phil. 3:6). In fact he even wished that if possible he could give up his salvation for the salvation of the Jewish people (Romans 9:2). Afterward he met Christ; he was a new man (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20), who had found in Christ the righteousness he had sought (Rom. 10:4; 1 Cor. 1:30). He was still a Hebrew (2 Cor. 11:22; Phil 3:5), but he was no longer a Jew living according to the Law (I . . . am not under the law). Still, he was willing to subject himself to the scruples of the Jews (e.g., Acts 21:23-36) in order to gain a hearing for the gospel and to win them to Christ. Yet he never compromised the essence of the gospel at the heart of which was salvation by faith, not works (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9) and freedom from legalism (Gal. 2:4-5). While he was attempting to endear himself to the Jews he did not engage in any immoral activity.

*1 Corinthians 9: 21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.*

In contrast to the Jews, "those under the Law" (v. 20), those not having the Law were the *Gentiles*. Among Gentiles, Paul was willing to abandon past scruples of a morally indifferent sort, such as eating meat offered sacrificially to a pagan god (10:27;

cf. Acts 15:29), in order to win Gentiles to Christ. In other words he conformed himself to the gentiles practices because he know that he would be endearing himself to them. This does not mean that Paul was living like a pagan and engaging in idolatry or immorality. He was still under authority, but not to the Old Testament Law. He was responsible to God (cf. 3:9) and Christ (cf. 4:1) and was enabled by the Spirit to fulfill the law of love (Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-25), the opposite of lawlessness (cf. Matthew 24:12 where lawlessness drives out love). Christ's law (Gal. 6:2) was to love God and man (Mark 12:30-31), which law Paul obeyed (1 Corinthians 10:31-33). Some false teachers of his day told the Gentiles that they had to become Jews first before they could become Christians. Paul did not do this. His entire efforts were directed at gaining Christ for them.

*1 Corinthians 9: 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.*

Here Paul is referring explicitly to the weak Corinthians described in 1 Corinthians 8:9-11 (cf. Jew, Greeks, and the church of God in 10:32). His concern to win them was not in the preliminary sense of justification as in the case of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles (9:20-21) but to win the Corinthians in terms of sanctification and maturity in Christ (cf. Matthew 18:15)—and so to save them for God's ongoing work in their lives (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5; 8:11). Consider the previous lesson where we discussed the weak believer that was new in the faith and needed rules to guide their behavior. Paul wanted to come along beside them too and identify with them so as to be empathetic and win them to growth in Christ. He simply wanted people to listen to him. He wanted to be one of them! Some call this finding common ground. Paul was willing to go to great length to teach salvation in Christ alone and sanctification as a growth process for the developing believer.

*1 Corinthians 9: 23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.*

Paul voluntarily did this in order to gain the widest possible hearing for the gospel and so to share in its blessings as God's fellow worker reaping the joyful harvest of many won to Christ. It must be realized that Paul was driven to accomplish the goals that Christ had set before him. When he says all things for the sake of the gospel he meant everything up to an immoral act. His focus was to meet people where they were at to spread the gospel and cause the believers to grow more Christ like in the knowledge and love for the Lord Jesus. Paul knew that the more one know the Scripture, God's plan for the ages and exactly who the Lord Jesus is the more we will love him and want to obey him.

*1 Corinthians 9: 24-25 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.*

Paul's commitment to this course of ministry did not come easily. It required personal discipline (strict training) like that of an athlete who strove for supremacy in his field. To that end Paul willingly gave up certain privileges, which might otherwise be his to enjoy so that he could win the prize. The prize for Paul was not the temporary crown (*stephanos*) bestowed by men (in the biennial games near Corinth the "crown" was a pine wreath) but the eternal crown bestowed by Christ Paul's crown would be the consummation of the reward he partially enjoyed, the opportunity to glory before Christ in those he had been able to win. Paul was willing always to give up his rights to win people to Christ.

The illustration that he utilized here was the isthmian games that occurred every two years at Corinth. Since the games' inception, Corinth had always been in control of them. When the Romans destroyed Corinth in 146 BC, the isthmian games continued, but were now administered by Sicyon. Caesar rebuilt Corinth in 44 B.C. Corinth recovered ownership of the Games at some point between 7 BC and AD 3. The Isthmian Games thereafter flourished until Theodosius I suppressed them as a pagan ritual. These games were second only to the Olympic games. This illustration would have great contemporary import to the Corinthians. He wanted them to know the extent of his preparation and devotion to spreading Christianity.

Paul had much preparation for his mission. He was well educated. His Jewish schooling finished in Jerusalem, where he sat at the feet of the renowned Jewish teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

Gamaliel had a great reputation among all the people of Jerusalem. He showed the capacity to rise above the legalism of the Pharisees (Acts 5:34-39). Paul's training in Jerusalem under Gamaliel helped equip Paul to serve God. Paul spoke Aramaic, Hebrew and likely Greek.

Paul's conversion can be dated to AD 33 - AD 36 by his reference to it in one of his letters. According to the Acts of the Apostles, his conversion took place on the road to Damascus, where he experienced a vision of the resurrected Jesus after which he was temporarily blinded.

Following his stay in Damascus after his conversion he was healed of his blindness and baptized by Ananias of Damascus. Paul says that he first went to Arabia, and then came back to Damascus. He describes in Galatians how three years after his conversion he went to Jerusalem. There he met James and stayed with Simon Peter for 15 days.

There is no explicit written record that Paul had known Jesus personally prior to the Crucifixion. Paul asserted that he received the Gospel not from any person, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul's narrative in Galatians states that 14 years after his conversion he went again to Jerusalem. It is not completely known what happened during these so-called "unknown years," but both Acts and Galatians provide some partial details. At the end of this time, Barnabas went to find Paul and brought him back to Antioch.

For us this means that we are *not* in a state of final maturity at the point of belief. It requires keen knowledge, appropriate zeal with a healthy set of attitudes! You must read, study and apply the Word of God. This is why Jesus said, after baptizing people; teach them "to observe all things that I have commanded you," (Matthew 28:20). Christians are trained for service all their lives by growing in the inspired Word of God (see II Timothy 3:16,17). If we quit training we can no longer run. Our "running" depends on our

training. Once-in-a-while effort doesn't fulfill this. We must "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us," and "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus..." (Hebrews 12:1,2).

When a runner in a track event starts watching other racers or pays attention to the audience, precious time is lost. The self-discipline will pay this great dividend. It would be enough to have the privilege of living your life here morally right, honoring Christ and glorifying God. But there is something for us at the end, granted by a gracious God. "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown." Discipline develops excellence, and that excellence is rewarded.

*I Corinthians 9: 26-27 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*

Paul lived his life as a Christian, exemplifying this self-discipline he taught. "Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." It's all about the self-discipline we can develop by trusting and obeying the Lord. That's the unifying theme of these three chapters in First Corinthians. And this can be the unifying energy and fullness of your life. Forgetting the things that are behind, Paul urges us to stretch forward to the things, which are before. He said, I PRESS ON (see Philippians 3:13,14).

Every move made in the course of his race was calculated to further his pursuit of the prize. To achieve this, Paul would not let his body master him, sometimes he denied even its demand for rightful privileges and pleasures for a greater good.

Paul was competing well himself and had called many to join him but that did not guarantee him a victorious finish. He held out the possibility that even he could be disqualified for the prize. Here Paul was not addressing the issue of salvation, nor for that matter was even the prize specifically in mind. Rather, he seemed concerned with continuance in the race. Like the brother who had indulged in immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1-5), Paul's life could be cut short by the disciplinary disapproval of God. God had disciplined in the past (10:6-10), was disciplining in the present (11:30-32), and would discipline in the immediate future (5:5).

Israel of old was reckless and unrestrained after her physical and spiritual freedom from tyranny in Egypt. This is a good example of what not to do. As a result God meted out severe discipline by cutting short the lives of many Israelites. They were all in the "race", but almost all were disqualified in spite of their advantages.

Many advantages were enjoyed by Israel. First, all the liberated Israelites enjoyed the supernatural guidance (Exodus 13:21) and protection (Exodus 14:19-20) of the pillar of cloud in their Exodus from Egypt. The Corinthians had similarly experienced God's guidance (cf. Luke 1:79) and protection (cf. 1 Peter 1:5). Second, all Israelites passed through the sea and experienced a miraculous deliverance from those who sought to take their lives (Exodus 14:21-28). So too had the Corinthians experienced a miraculous deliverance—salvation.

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