

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! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. 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. Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 SS 2/5/12 Job 7:1-7 Mark 1:29-39 Psalm 66
Hymns: 16, 37, 360, 315, 507

FREELY SPREAD THE GOSPEL!

Spread, oh, spread, thou mighty Word, Spread the kingdom of the Lord,
Wheresoever His breath has given Life to beings meant for heaven.

Tell them how the Father's will Made the world and keeps it still,
How His only Son He gave Man from sin and death to save. (TLH #507:1-2)

Dear Fellow believers in Christ,

The Apostle Paul begins our text, *“When I preach the Gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!”* Paul couldn't brag about himself for being a preacher of the Gospel. He couldn't brag about the message he preached, as if he had come up with on his own. Jesus had called Paul to be an apostle. Jesus had put it in Paul's heart to preach the Gospel. Paul preached the Gospel message he had received from Jesus Christ. And there was no way Paul could keep the Gospel to himself. He HAD to share the Good News that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save all people!

Paul says, *“If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.”* Paul had once hated Jesus Christ with a passion. Paul had dedicated himself to destroying everyone he could find who believed in Jesus Christ, and stopping the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But then Jesus came to Paul and converted him. JESUS made Paul one of His apostles and sent him out to preach and teach the very Gospel he had once despised. There was no way Paul could brag about preaching the Gospel. He was simply carrying out the calling Jesus had given him.

No minister of the Gospel has any right to brag about himself. The Bible tells us that we're all *“enemies”* of Christ by nature (Ro. 5:10). JESUS came to us and brought us from unbelief to faith in Him. JESUS saved us! And JESUS calls His pastors and teachers and sends them, and all of His people, out to spread His saving Gospel.

“What then is my reward?” Paul asks. *“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.”* Paul had

said before our text that he didn't need or receive financial support for his ministry from the Corinthian congregation (v. 14). Paul says that his "*reward*" wasn't a financial one. Paul's great blessing was simply in being able to preach the Gospel to others.

This is so true! Our greatest joy as pastor, Christian teacher – our greatest joy as Christians – is in being able to share the Gospel with others and watch it take root and grow in their hearts and lives.

Paul says, "*Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.*" Jesus died on the cross to set us free: free from our sins, free from our guilt, and free from having to save ourselves by our own goodness and good works. We don't want to abuse our freedom and live in a way that goes against what Jesus says. We want to exercise our freedom in joyful, willing service to Christ. In the exercise of his freedom in Christ, Paul gladly chose to make himself a "*slave,*" as he says, to everyone. Paul looked upon himself as a servant to everyone he met – to share the Gospel with everyone he could that they might believe it and be saved!

Paul says, "*To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.*" When Paul was among his fellow Jews who didn't believe in Jesus, he was careful not to do things (such as eating pork) that would offend their Jewish beliefs. He didn't want to, by failing to act in a loving way, upset the Jews and have them close their minds to his Gospel message. Paul wanted to tell his fellow Jews about Jesus so they could believe in Him and be saved!

"*To those not having the law,*" Paul says, "*I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.*" When Paul was among unbelieving gentiles he lived, within the bounds God's Word allows, much like they did. Again, Paul tried to avoid thoughtlessly offending people and having them close their minds to the Gospel. Paul hoped that they would listen to the Gospel and believe and be saved!

Paul says, "*To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.*" Paul had spoken to the Corinthians earlier about fellow believers whose faith is weak (8:9). Paul pointed out that weak believers misunderstand and misapply some of the Bible's teachings. A weak believer takes offense at other Christians who don't do certain things the way he thinks they should be done. With patience and understanding, Paul taught the weak believers the Word of God. Paul didn't want to carelessly upset fellow believers with weak faith and turn them away from God and His Word. Paul's hope and prayer was that they remain in their faith in Jesus.

"*To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.*" Like Jesus, Paul associated with people whom others would have nothing to do with – people who were caught up in sin, but were troubled by their sinful lives and were receptive to the Gospel. Paul didn't excuse the way they had been living, nor did he join them in their sinful living. He patiently, lovingly worked with them, teaching them God's Word. And God brought some of them to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus and be saved!

Paul says, "*I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*" Paul shared the Gospel with everyone he could. He preached in churches whether or not they could support his ministry financially. Paul spread the Gospel among Jews and gentiles. Paul willingly spread the Gospel among believers who were difficult

to work with. Paul spread the Gospel among the outcasts of society. Wherever and with whomever Paul had the opportunity, he kept spreading the Gospel. He told sinners to repent. And he invited repentant sinners to believe in Jesus Christ, who died for their sins on the cross, and receive forgiveness and eternal life! Paul was happy to do this. His joy was in seeing someone come to faith in Jesus and be saved!

I would like to read the following observations of others that help us apply what we've heard about Paul's Gospel ministry to our lives:

A true servant of Christ uses his liberty in the Gospel in no other way but for the edification of his neighbor and for the praise of God. ... Through love every Christian is the debtor of his neighbor, places himself at the service of his neighbor, has his [neighbor's] true spiritual welfare in mind at all times (Ro. 3:18) (Kretzmann's NT Commentary, vol. 2, p. 131). The Gospel not only frees us from sin but also frees us for service. ... Paul is not advocating changing the Gospel message to suit the hearers. There is only one name given under heaven by which we must be saved (1:18-31; Ac. 4:12). However, the changeless Gospel empowers us to sacrifice our own rights, tastes, interests, and preferences so that others might hear the message of Christ in all its power (The Lutheran Study Bible, p. 1958).

We didn't choose Jesus. Jesus chose us. The Bible says, "*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Ro. 5:8). Jesus died for our sins on the cross. Jesus came into our hearts and worked faith in our hearts in Him. Jesus has taken all of our sins away, and given us eternal life. "*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*" (1 Pet. 2:9). Share the Good News of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ wherever, and with whomever you can. Dear Christian friends, **FREELY SPREAD THE GOSPEL!**

Tell of our Redeemer's love, Who forever doth remove
By His holy sacrifice All the guilt that on us lies.

Lord of Harvest, let there be Joy and strength to work for Thee.
Till the nations far and near See Thy light and learn Thy fear. Amen.
(TLH #570:3, 6)