

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: The Church - a Work in Progress

(Studies in 1 Corinthians)

Waiving Our Rights to Find Treasure

(1 Corinthians 9)

Study #12

Introduction: A “waiver” in hopes of a great adventure...

I’ve never gone sky-diving or para-gliding - and neither are on my personal bucket list.

But I am told that before jumping out of a perfectly good airplane JUST FOR FUN, or getting lifted into the air by a boat, the company providing this service will require that you sign a waiver, promising that if there is “a little problem” you won’t sue them.

But you want the adrenalin rush, so you eagerly sign the waiver for the privilege of the adventure.

The first time I went camping at Big Bend Ranch State Park in West Texas, I was surprised to learn that I had to sign a waiver before leaving the ranger station.

The park needed to ensure that I knew that there were animals that could hurt me, plants that would stick me, and heat that could harm me - and that I wouldn’t sue the great state of Texas if I got hurt.

I happily signed the waiver for the privilege of enjoying a few days “out there.”

¹ Today’s message isn’t going in the direction I thought it would when I began to prepare. I was struck mid-week by the reality that our passage is sticking with the

Or say you find a house that you really love, in a great neighborhood, with a view of the city. You really want this house.

You might choose to waive the right to have an inspection of the air conditioning, plumbing, and electrical - you’ll fix them later if there’s a problem! - because you want to enjoy the treasure of this perfect home.

In each case, signing the waiver signs away a right, but that waiving of a right allows you to enjoy an adventure or a treasure.

As we listen today, the Apostle Paul tells us about rights he has happily waived to more fully enter into the adventure of serving Jesus. And he invites us all to do the same.

Review of last Sunday....

Last Sunday, Paul equipped us with tools to use when we are faced with a decision where the Bible gives no clear guidance.

He told us to be guided by a concern to not:

- (1) be a stumbling-block.
- (2) wound a brother or a sister.
- (3) damage another’s conscience.

In other words, we are to be guided by love.

To highlight the importance of living with the best interests of the other person in mind, Paul wrote, **[8:13] Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to sin.**

That was the point of 1 Corinthians 8. 1 Corinthians 9, our passage for today, expands on that theme.¹

same theme we saw last week with important, additional insights. Better grasping the text changed the sermon’s direction. That’s how sermon-making works.

ENJOYING Legitimate Rights and Privileges (9:1-14)

Paul's Credibility as Jesus' Apostle (9:1-2)

Paul's apostleship (v. 1a; Acts 9)

[1a] Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?

All three of these questions anticipate a "Yes." Yes, Paul was free. He was free in Jesus in all the ways that any Christian is free to follow his own conscience and to enjoy the liberties he had in Jesus.

And, yes, Paul was an apostle. Yes, he had seen Jesus.²

He probably wouldn't have spent time affirming that he was an apostle if that wasn't doubted by some in Corinth. But some Christians in the church at Corinth did doubt Paul's apostleship.³

But in Paul's case, the story of his conversion to faith, which was also his call to apostleship, was clear and actually undisputable.

Luke tells us (Acts 9) that Paul had gone to Damascus to arrest Christians and drag them back to Jerusalem for trial.

When he was almost at the city's gates, Jesus appeared to him, temporarily blinded him, and revealed to Paul who He was.

Paul believed and was commissioned as an apostle. And we listen as Paul continued to validate that he really was Jesus' apostle.

Corinth: The seal of Paul's apostleship (vv. 1b-2)

[1b]...Are you not my work in the Lord? [2] If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

² Paul said that Jesus appeared to him (1 Corinthians 15:8), which was required for someone included in the strictest definition of "apostle." (Acts 1:21-22)

Paul came to Corinth with the life-giving, life-changing message of Jesus. God used Paul's life and words to touch hearts. People came to faith in Jesus.

Over the eighteen months Paul spent in Corinth, he disciplined these new believers. He taught them how to walk with Jesus.

His ministry was marked by Spirit-giftedness and that marked him as a true apostle. Paul was the spiritual father of the church in Corinth. That church was Paul's stamp of apostleship.

And then, as if he was a defendant on trial, he claimed that he had certain unalienable rights, since he was an apostle.

Paul's Rights as Jesus' Apostle (9:3-6)

Freedom to be supported by the faith community (vv. 4, 6)

[3] My defense to those who examine me is this: [4] Do we not have a right to eat and drink?...[6] Or do only Barnabas⁴ and I have no right to refrain from working?

Paul asserted his right to receive financial support for his work.

Because of what he had just been talking about (chapter 8, food sacrificed to idols), we might think that he was saying that he was free to eat non-kosher food. But, as will become clear, he was arguing that he had the right to expect support from the faith community.

Then, speaking about himself and Barnabas, he laid claim to another right.

Freedom to marry (v. 5)

[5] Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

³ The uncertainty about Paul's apostolic status is more apparent in 2 Cor. 10-13.

⁴ Paul thought of Barnabas as an apostle, even if not in the strictest sense.

Evidently, all the other apostles were married by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. So were Jesus' half-brothers, the sons of Joseph and Mary, and at least a couple of those were fervent Jesus followers.⁵

Paul and Barnabas had every right to marry, too. And nobody would have denied them that right. But they had not married.⁶

Generally, the thought here is that Paul had rights. He had the right to receive financial support and the right to get married.

The other apostles all chose to take advantage of the rights that were theirs, and Paul had no problem with them doing that.

But Paul (and Barnabas, his long-time ministry partner), waived those rights. They kept on earning their own keep, didn't receive support, and didn't marry.

In doing this, they were living counter to the way the world generally works. Generally, speaking benefits accompany hard work.

Paul's Rationale for His Rights as Jesus' Apostle (9:7-14)

The lesson we learn from soldiers, farmers, shepherds (v. 7)

[7] Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not consume some of the milk of the flock?

Each of these people Paul lists receive pay for their labors.

- Soldiers serve for a wage.
- Farmers eat their own crops.
- Shepherds and ranchers milk their own herds and flocks.

In these - and in all occupations - remuneration is accepted as the norm. It's even true in the world of working animals.

The lesson we learn from the threshing ox (vv. 8-10)

[8] I am not just asserting these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does the Law not say these things as well? [9] For it is written in the Law of Moses: "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE IT IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? [10] Or is He speaking entirely for our sake? Yes, it was written for our sake, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing in the crops.

Under the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 24), muzzling the ox while he was threshing wheat was illegal. And, if God was not indifferent to the needs of oxen, but actually cared about them, how much more must He care about people.

The point is that soldiers and farmers and shepherds and oxen and most everybody (!) reap reward from their labors. The application is that apostles should, too.

The lessons learned applied to apostles (vv. 11-14)

The rightness of material support (vv. 11-12a, 13-14)

[11] If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? [12] If others share the right over you, do we not more?...[13] Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? [14] So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.⁷

⁵ Jesus' brothers were James (the author of the New Testament letter), Jesus, Judas (author of the letter we call "Jude" in the New Testament), and Simon. (Mark 6:3)

⁶ Some say that Paul asserts here the right of the apostle, if married, to take his wife with him as he traveled, she as well being supported by the church. I am more drawn to the idea that he was simply saying that he could have married.

⁷ This may be a reference to Luke 10:7, "...the laborer is deserving of his wages."

Paul was saying that it really wasn't too much to ask that if you receive the message of eternal life through faith alone in Jesus alone from an apostle, you provide that apostle with room and board.

Arguing from how the world generally works, apostles - men like Paul and Barnabas - had every right to be compensated for their ministry efforts among their converts.

But - surprise! - Paul didn't seek or accept money from Corinth for his labors.

Paul's and Barnabas' choice (v. 12b)

[12b]...Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

Paul waived his right to present the Corinthians with a bill for his ministry. He took great pains to prove that apostolic rights were a real thing...and then refused to make use of them.⁸

WAIVING Legitimate Rights and Privileges (9:15-23)

Waiving the Right to Receiving a Salary (9:15-18)

Paul's Policy decision to not make use of his apostolic privilege / authority (v. 15)

[15] But I have used none of these things. And I have not written these things so that it will be done so in my case...

Again, Paul preached the Gospel at Corinth. He was the guy God used to start the Corinthians on the Jesus Way. And for having played that role, he had every right to receive financial support from the Corinthians - and he waived that right.

He even said, ***[15]...for it would be better for me to die than that. No one shall make my boast an empty one!***⁹

Listen to him describe his perspective on his own ministry.

Paul's Stewardship: Preach the Gospel (vv. 16-17)

[16] For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about, for I am under compulsion; for woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. [17] For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a commission nonetheless.

Paul's "boast" was not that he preached the Gospel.

That was the commission Jesus gave him when He set Paul apart as an apostle. He had to preach Jesus.

So, there would be severe and negative consequences if he refused to do that. (That's what is implied by "woe to me.")

If he fulfilled his commission voluntarily and with an eager heart, great. He'll receive a reward. And on those days when he wasn't feeling it, would have rather not, was afraid or uncertain, he was still under orders - so preach Jesus he did.

There was no escape from the stewardship God gave him and he didn't boast about doing it.

But he did have a "boast," a reason for his hope for a reward.

Paul's Reward (v. 18)

[18] What, then, is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

⁸ While in Corinth, he worked as a tent-maker until his teammates, Timothy and Silas, arrived to join him. Then, they worked while he gave himself fully to the ministry. But he never charged the Corinthians.

⁹ C.K. Barrett has a more literal - and a more powerful - translation, "For I would rather die than...no, no one shall make this boast of mine an empty thing."

His boast was that he offered a free gospel FREELY, that he waived his rights and preached without charge.

The same line of thinking continued as he listed another waiver he's signed.

Waiving the Right to Free Self-Expression (9:19-23)

Paul, the self-enslaved free man (9:19)

[19] For though I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may gain more.

To be a free person in any society is a tremendous advantage. It is today and it was in the first century.

As a Roman citizen, Paul enjoyed lots of privileges in the public square. As an apostle, he deserved - and usually received - a lot of respect from the Christian community.

He was the "strong-conscience" Christian he wrote about (chapter 8) who knew that he could eat anything he wanted to eat - meat sacrificed to pagan idols, kosher food, unclean food - and it didn't matter one bit to God.

He was one of those men who wasn't shackled by fear about what other people thought of him. He was, truly, free, to do what he wanted to do and to be what he wanted to be.

And he waived that right to free self-expression and to be his own man and on purpose chose slavery to the ways and weaknesses of others.¹⁰

¹⁰ See the example of an Old Testament slave who loved his master. Rather than accept his freedom after six years of serving as a slave, this slave chose to remain his master's slave. To seal the deal, the master would "*pierce*" that slave's ear (as I understand it, making a hole, not for jewelry), turning him from a slave into a bond-slave, a voluntary slave for the rest of his life. (Exodus 21; Deuteronomy 15)

Paul, the spiritual chameleon (9:20-23)

[20] To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might gain Jews; to those who are under the Law, I became as one under the Law, though not being under the Law myself, so that I might gain those who are under the Law; [21] to those who are without the Law, I became as one as without the Law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might gain those who are without the Law. [22a] To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak...

Paul grew up as a strict, orthodox Jew, was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He became a Pharisee. No one was more Jewish than Paul.

Then, he became a Christian with a commission to take the good news of Jesus to non-Jews. With that commission, he learned to live as a Gentile.

But he never forgot what it was to be a Jew. So, when he was with Jews, he reverted to enough Jewishness to make the Jews around him feel comfortable.¹¹

And when he hung with the Gentiles, he behaved and dressed and ate like a Gentile to better fit into Gentile culture.

Paul was a chameleon, a shape-shifter who made it his aim to fit into whichever group he was with. And his chameleon-ish ways extended beyond the religious world.

Paul was a strong person in personality and willpower, maybe physical strength. Paul accommodated himself to those who were "*weak*" by becoming weak, himself, when he was with people who were weak.

¹¹ Note what Luke records in Acts 21. Paul had been having extraordinary success in reaching Gentiles on the Third Missionary Journey where he lived and worked as if he was a Gentile. But when he returned to the city of Jerusalem, he took the advice of some local Jewish Christian leaders to put himself under the Law by taking a "vow," (which required him to cut his hair, an outward sign of Jewishness) thereby putting himself in a better position to be listened to by the Jews there.

In thinking about this, I wonder if we could compare Paul to Jesus, who was famous for spending time with “*tax-collectors and sinners.*” (Matthew 11:19)

These were the dregs of first-century society. They might have been wealthy, but they were outcasts. Weak.

Yet Jesus was their “Friend” even as He became the most influential Rabbi in Israel.

Can we picture Jesus adapting his interactions when with these people in such a way that they wouldn’t be intimidated, wouldn’t feel inferior, would sense that they were loved for being the image-of-God bearers they were?¹²

Paul took his cue from Jesus and did the same with the weak in his world: with the poor, the disabled, the disenfranchised.

His summary says it all. **[22]...I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. [23] I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.**

Paul began by making the case that he, Jesus’ apostle, had all kinds of rights that he could use to his advantage. (9:1-14)

He then told us that he had waived the right to be supported financially by those he served AND he waived the right to marry AND he waived his right to free expression, making himself a slave to the ways and to the weaknesses of others.

Paul’s concluding thoughts answer the “*Why in the world would you do this?*” question.

Why would Paul waive perfectly legitimate rights, when doing so made his life harder, brought him mockery and insult, and ruined his reputation?

Here’s Reason #1.

WHY Waive Legitimate Rights and Freedoms? (9:23-27)

THAT MORE PEOPLE MIGHT BE SAVED (9:19, 20, 21, 22)

In saying that he gave up the right of free self-expression to better connect with “*all people*” (vv. 20-22), four times he tells us that it was “*so that I may by all means save*” the Jew, the non-Jew, the person enslaved to Law, and the weak.

If we’re looking for reasons to imitate Paul, here’s one compelling reason: We waive our rights (like the right to free self-expression) so that we might be better positioned to tell the person we are with the best news they’ll ever hear and introduce them to Jesus.

High on the list of reasons missionaries give for leaving home for distant lands and saying good-bye to friends and family, to comfort and familiarity, is that the missionary wanted to see people in gospel-starved places know the amazing grace of God.

When you bend over backward to adapt to different cultures around you, or when we adapt our demeanor to “fit” the mood of the person we’re with, or when we give up our right to express ourselves however we want out of love for the person we’re with, we may open a door to tell someone about our Jesus.

Paul waived his right so that more men and women and young people and children would be saved. He invites us to do the same.

Here’s Paul’s Reason #2 to the “*Why waive personal rights?*” question.

TO BECOME A FELLOW PARTAKER IN THE GOSPEL (9:23)

[23] I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

¹² Isaiah, writing about the coming Messiah, said, **[Isaiah 42:3] A bent reed He will not break off.** (Quoted in Matthew 12:20)

Paul's willingness to waive his rights is wrapped up in his deep longing to be identified with the truth that sets people free, brings forgiveness of sin, establishes relationship with God, and gives eternal life: the gospel.

The rights he waived were waived to so intimately identify him with Jesus that no matter who thought of him, when they thought of him, they would think, "*Jesus. Jesus' gospel.*"

He didn't want people thinking about what a great guy he was, great scholar, world traveler, how courageous, or what a fine, upstanding Roman citizen he was.

No. Paul was a "one-thing" kind of man, with a single-eyed focus on what was most important. He wanted to be and to be thought of as a "**fellow partaker**" of Jesus' Gospel.

And here is Reason #3 for "*Why waive personal rights?*"

TO WIN THE PRIZE (9:24-27)

The truth about winning (9:24-25a)

[24] 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. [25a] Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things.

Athletic contests were common in the Greek world, so Paul was speaking about something that everybody in Corinth understood. In fact, the Isthmian Games were held once every three years in Corinth.

In these Games, every competitor would go through ten months of strict training prior to competing.

As we all know, any athlete who wants to win a race or win any competition has got to deny himself some completely legitimate pleasures while in training.

So, before a competition, athletes have to waive their rights to eat anything they want to eat or to take a long weekend away from training. They give focused attention to nutrition and to disciplined training.

If a first-century athlete was successful and won his race, he would **[25]...receive a perishable wreath** - suitable for hanging on his head or on the front door, with the certainty that it would look pretty bad, pretty soon, as all the pine needles dropped off.

Christians compete for a far greater prize.

The race we run and how to run it (9:25b-27a)

We race for an imperishable wreath / prize (v. 25b)

[25b]...but we an imperishable.

The "**prize**" Paul is talking about is NOT eternal life. A Christian receives eternal life, given as a gift to those who believe in Jesus.

The "**prize**" is a reward given to us on the basis of our faithfulness here. It is not temporary. It is "**imperishable.**"¹³

The value and lasting nature of this "**prize**" explains why we compete for it with every ounce of energy and attention and focus we can muster.

How to run our race / fight the good fight (vv. 26-27a)

[26] Therefore I run in such a way as not to run aimlessly; I box in such a way, as to avoid hitting air; [27] but I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave...

There's only one winner in a foot race. But that isn't what's going on here. I'm not trying to beat you and you're not out to beat anybody else. We win when we run the best race we can for Jesus.

¹³ Peter adds "**undefiled and unfading.**" (1 Peter 1:4)

And here is what I'd like for us all to remember as we think about this race we run for the prize Jesus offers: Our God is a very good. He rewards those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6) He knows our weaknesses. Jesus is a merciful High Priest.

He gave Himself for us on the cross. He is currently making intercession for us as we run this race. Jesus is FOR us.

He wants to reward us with the prize of a joyful, abundant life now, and by shouting, "Well done!" on the other side, and with the privilege of reigning with Him as His partners in His coming kingdom.

So, don't fear that you haven't done enough to satisfy Him. Just keep following Jesus. Nobody does that perfectly. Just don't stop. Keep running. If you stumble, get up and run again.

And at the end, you will find God better than you ever dreamed He would be.

But...Paul does offer a warning at the very end that we do well to give attention to.

The danger of disqualification (9:27b)

[27b]...so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Just as receiving the "prize" has nothing to do with the gift of eternal life, being "disqualified" has nothing to do with losing eternal life.¹⁴

But the reality is that if we stop running (stop following Jesus), we won't enjoy Jesus' abundant life here and now, we won't hear, "Well done!" then and there, and we won't have the privilege of reigning with Jesus in His kingdom.¹⁵

So, in Jesus, we have massive rights and privileges...which we will sometimes waive so that...

...others may come to know Jesus.

...we will become fellow partakers of the gospel.

...we will win the prize Jesus wants us to have now, and in the life to come.

This is an adventure, and these are treasures we don't want to miss!

¹⁴ In ancient times, the word "disqualified" (Greek - *adokimos*; also translated "useless" or "unapproved") described a runner who failed the test of the race and didn't go to the winner's podium.

¹⁵ Believers may be disqualified for the prize (here, v. 27), stand ashamed at His coming (1 John 2:28), and lose the reward for which they could have worked. (2 John 8)