

Giving it All for the Gospel of Jesus Christ 1 Corinthians 9:1-18 Pastor Guy Gray

The Beauty, the Power and the Incomparable Value of the Gospel

The entire Book of 1 Corinthians is really about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This may seem strange to say, given that we have talked about all kinds of practical life issues, like sex, dating and marriage. The truth is that every bit of this is actually about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You see the question is, "What is the real Gospel and how can I experience its reality in my heart and live it out in my life." This is why you will find specific references to the Gospel over and over in Corinthians. Paul began with a focus on the Gospel and the power of the Cross in the Christian life (chapter 1). Paul builds to a climax in speaking of the Gospel and the power of Christ's resurrection (chapter 15). At the heart of his discussion of "practical" matters and moral issues, he brings the focus once again to his central theme—the gospel. There are two reasons for this. One thing Paul is ever showing us is how to live our whole lives from the central themes of the gospel of Christ—so that every aspect of our lives is literally a living out of the gospel. Secondly, Paul wants the Corinthians to know that he is so fired up by the beauty, the power and the incomparable value of the gospel that his whole life is given over to the ministry because of it. He is captured by the gospel, heart, mind and energy. He wants the Corinthians to see this and he wants them to share in this same enthusiasm for the gospel.

The Bizarre Challenge of Being "In the Ministry"

Much of our passage is about being "in the ministry." Paul gives us a window into his own experience of ministry to the Corinthians and the truth is it isn't very pretty. Apparently there were those at Corinth who were "sitting in judgment" of Paul. Welcome to the ministry! Paul reveals for us the unique and bizarre challenges of being in the ministry. Paul has literally poured out his life to come to these people and share Christ with them. God has done an amazing work through Paul at Corinth and there is now a Christian Community planted there, sharing in the hope of Christ and spreading the gospel of Christ to a needy world. Nevertheless, a bunch of people are critical of Paul. This may surprise us but it didn't surprise Paul—he already knew that being in the ministry is the toughest job in the whole world. That hasn't changed either. Recent statistics paint a bleak picture of pastors burning out, experiencing moral failure or getting discouraged and quitting the ministry at record rates.

Navigating these waters is tricky. Part of the problem is in the area of financial support. It can become a problem when a church doesn't do a good job of financially supporting their pastors. Paul shows clearly in the passage that the "norm" should be for churches to give their pastors adequate financial support. He then goes on to say that he himself did not want financial support from the Corinthians. This unexpected twist reveals a whole different problem—that often pastors can become overly influenced by the financial support aspect of ministry. For Paul, to accept financial support from the Corinthians would mean putting himself under the influence of certain wealthy contributors at Corinth who were completely messed up in their view of the gospel. Paul refused to let that happen. The lesson here is that pastors must guard their hearts and motives in ministry. If ministry ever becomes a "job" in order to keep the paycheck coming in and to have the trappings of "success," you can be assured that the gospel message will soon be watered down. The true gospel message is often challenging and unpopular in our culture, all of this is part of the intense challenge of being in "ministry".

Staying True to the Gospel is Everything

Paul had one primary guiding principle in all of this—staying true to the gospel is everything! Paul was literally willing to do anything for the gospel. He would sacrifice his rights—his finances—his comfort for the gospel. He was willing to put up with people who were critical and angry with him, for the gospel. He would labor for the gospel and he would never stop. And that, by the way is the heart of a person who is going to do well in the "ministry."

What Will You Do for the Gospel?

This lesson isn't just about Paul, it's about the Corinthians. It's about us too. Paul is using his own life as an example so that they can learn what their outlook should be as they follow Christ. So the question that calls out to each of us is whether we are in vocational ministry or not (since we are all called to ministry for Jesus), is this: "What will you do for the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Put another way, what do you think Jesus wants to do through you? I imagine He wants to do a lot! Oh that we each had a heart for the Gospel like Paul—willing to put up with all kinds of things, all

for the beauty, the power and influence of the Gospel! That is a world changing kind of outlook and that is what 1 Corinthians is all about!

Questions for further Exploration and Discussion:

This week, spend time reading through 1 Corinthians 9:1-18.

What does the text reveal about some of the criticisms that were being leveled against Paul? What is the heart of Paul that can be seen in his response to the Corinthians about these matters? What is most important to Paul?

For the Sake of the Gospel

What have you had to put up with in your life for the sake of the gospel? What was the fruit in your life or in the life of another because of this hardship?

Coming Up...

TONIGHT

Sunday 1/20

**El Salvador Mission Trip Information Meeting,
7-8:00pm @ RWCC**

Come and hear exciting information about our upcoming El Salvador Mission Trip. This is an opportunity to learn more about what is happening with the people and our relationship with Agros. The trip will be from April 25th – May 3rd. For more information contact Gerry Friesen at 503.635.1233 or gerry@friesen.com

SIGN UP TODAY...

Are you plugged in?

This month in the lobby you can get plugged into the community at River West Church. Just put your name in the fish bowl and we will make sure you get "plugged in"

Financial Peace University

We will be offering Financial Peace University again beginning on Monday, February 4th at 6:30pm. This is a 13 week series that teaches biblical principles on how to handle our finances. We will cover topics such as; communicating with your spouse about money, paying off and staying out of debt, teaching your children about money, learning to be a cheerful giver, and many other practical topics. Sign up today in the fellowship hall or contact Julie Messenger at 503-699-2226 or Julie@riverwest.org.

Outreach Ministries Drive...

Our Outreach Ministries need your help, this month bring your new or almost new, coats, socks, maternity clothes & sleeping bags, etc... as well as nutritious foods to church.