

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 9:1-27

Title

***“I Win Them One Peeps at a Time,
And it Doesn’t Cost Them a Dime...
You’ll Know It’s Me
When I Come Through Your Town”¹***

I don’t think I’m ready for Self-driving Cars. They are also called Autonomous Vehicles, Driverless Cars, and Robo Cars. One description reads like this:

Self-driving cars combine a variety of sensors to perceive their surroundings, such as radar, lidar, sonar, GPS, odometry and inertial measurement units. Advanced control systems interpret sensory information to identify appropriate navigation paths, as well as obstacles and relevant signage.

Nova (the program on PBS, *not* the classic Chevrolet) just released a pretty well-balanced documentary called *Look Whose Driving*. To grab your attention, it opens with the now-infamous Uber self-driving car accident that occurred last year, which took the life of a pedestrian. There was a driver behind the wheel, but the car was confirmed to be in autonomous driving mode at the time.

You and I aren’t cars; but you could say we have to “identify appropriate navigation paths, as well as obstacles” as we walk with Jesus both in the church and out in the world.

¹ With thanks to Johnny Cash



Do you remember the bumper-sticker that read, *Jesus is My Co-pilot?* That's downright demeaning. Jesus better be **piloting** my life.

That doesn't mean that we can kick-back and enjoy the sights while Jesus takes the wheel. We are involved, actively making decisions, determining how to interpret and apply the Bible, as we progress on the narrow way and look forward to reaching the Golden City, whose builder and maker is God.

The apostle Paul is going to tell us how he navigated. He mentions "the Gospel" no less than nine times in these few verses - in 12, 14, 16, 18 & 23. He defends his activities in the church and in the world, among different groups, saying, "Now this I do for the gospel's sake..." (v23).

We, too, are to navigate our walk with Jesus by the Gospel. We'll see some of what that means as we work through chapter nine. I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Let The Gospel Determine When To Wave Your Rights In The Church** and **#2 Let The Gospel Determine When To Wave Your Rights In The World.**

#1 - Let The Gospel Determine When To Wave Your Rights In The Church (v1-18)

BTW: Human errors cause 94% of all serious motor vehicle accidents. Robots can't do much worse.

The Gospel is that Jesus, God in human flesh, was crucified, buried and rose again, appearing to Peter and the other disciples and then to a great number (First Corinthians 15:1-5).

"He was crucified for our sins and was raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Paul preached the Gospel in Corinth. Men and women, mostly Gentiles but also Jews, were saved. They began to seek each other out, and gather together. But like any gathering of imperfect people, problems arose.

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Paul had written them a letter, prior to this one, in which he addressed their problems.

The believers did not like his answers, so they disobeyed Paul. But in order to feel justified in disobeying an apostle, they took a second look at him. They suggested that he was not a 'real' apostle, like the twelve.

Paul felt he needed to answer their criticism, but he skillfully wove into his answer a bedrock principle: You should be ready to wave your rights if exercising or demanding them might hinder the Gospel.

1Co 9:1 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

These questions all require an exclamatory "Yes!" answer:

- "Am I not an apostle?" Yes, he was, in the unique first century sense of laying the foundation for the church and exercising signs and wonders.
- "Am I not free?" As an apostle, under the Lord's authority, he was "free" from anyone else's opinions or criticisms or leading.
- "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" Yes, he had, on the road to Damascus. It was one of the requirements for an apostle that they had seen the risen Lord.

1Co 9:2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

Paul had founded their church and performed the miraculous works of an apostle among them. Even if others wanted to, they could not reasonably deny his apostleship in Corinth. Their criticism was a miscalculated dodge for their disobedience.

1Co 9:3 My defense to those who examine me is this:

1Co 9:4 Do we have no right to eat and drink?

1Co 9:5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

1Co 9:6 Or *is it* only Barnabas and I *who* have no right to refrain from working?

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These next three “Yes!” questions reveal three specific criticisms the Corinthians leveled against Paul’s apostleship:

1. Paul did not ask them for support, to be able to “eat and drink.” He worked to support himself. Apparently other apostles did receive support. So they concluded Paul was not a bonafide apostle.
2. Paul and Barnabas didn’t travel with wives like other apostles.
3. The Corinthians didn’t think it was “right” for an apostle to work. This might be a criticism that Paul wasn’t totally committed to the work of the ministry.

Thus they had formulated their own criteria for apostleship: An apostle must receive support rather than support himself, and he must travel with his wife. Notice none of it was spiritual; it was all fleshly.

1Co 9:7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?

These three illustrations from everyday life show that the receiving of material support for your work is customary. Apostleship, although a calling, is work, and those so-called have the right to support.

1Co 9:8 Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same also?

1Co 9:9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE AN OX WHILE IT TREADS OUT THE GRAIN." Is it oxen God is concerned about?

1Co 9:10 Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.

The “law” that Paul quoted was Deuteronomy 25:4. The “ox” was to be permitted to eat of the grain while he labored pulling the grinding wheel. While the verse established the ethical treatment of animals under our stewardship, Paul indicated that it was also intended to be applied to the proper treatment of human laborers. The worker is worthy of wages.

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1Co 9:11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, *is it* a great thing if we reap your material things?

1Co 9:12 If others are partakers of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more?...

So far this was a strange defense. Paul seemed to be agreeing with them. An apostle does have the right to receive support.

Paul and his colleagues had even more occasion to be supported by them, having founded the church by leading them to Jesus. Where was he going with this?

1Co 9:12 If others are partakers of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more? **Nevertheless** we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.

It never occurred to them that Paul was voluntarily waving his rights, and that he was doing it for them. Has it ever occurred to you... Or to us... to voluntarily wave our rights for the sake of others?

1Co 9:13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat *of the things* of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings* of the altar?

1Co 9:14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

In God's temple at Jerusalem, and in every pagan temple throughout the Empire, the priests were materially supported by those they ministered to. It was the expected, accepted practice. How much more deserving are ministers of the Gospel.

"Those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel." If you are being ministered to *spiritually* then you are to support the *ministry* materially. In Second Corinthians Paul tells us that we should give financially to the church we attend and that our giving should be regular, sacrificial, and joyful.

"Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the Gospel of Christ."

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Paul needed to answer the accusation that he was not a 'real' apostle; but the point he really wanted to make was that he waved his rights as an apostle in order to be most effective in sharing Jesus with others.

1Co 9:15 But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it *would be* better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.

A paraphrase of this reads, "Still, I want it made clear that I've never gotten anything out of this for myself, and that I'm not writing now to get something. I'd rather die than give anyone ammunition to discredit me or impugn my motives" (The Message).

He wasn't asking for back pay; he wasn't demanding his wages. He had waved his rights.

You have the right to wave your rights - which you should if the Gospel warrants it in your situation.

Paul was extra-sensitive to any accusation that he preached the Gospel for material gain. He thus refused pay for it, so no one could impugn him, and thereby cast doubt on the Gospel itself.

Think about that word "die." It is a hyperbole to emphasize just how serious it is to be hindering the Gospel. Wages weren't the issue; winning souls was, and is.

1Co 9:16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

He didn't choose his course of life. Jesus did, especially when He saved Paul on the road to Damascus.

1Co 9:17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.

I found myself consulting alternate translation quite a lot this week. Here is verse seventeen in one of them: "If this was my own idea of just another way to

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make a living, I'd expect some pay. But since it's not my idea but something solemnly entrusted to me, why would I expect to get paid?"

Paul's approach to being an apostle was that it was more like a stewardship, and that he was more like a steward. A "steward" (usually a slave) was one who has been "entrusted with" managing a household. Such a person was not entitled to pay. Their needs were met by the master, and he provided everything required and requested for the carrying-out of his orders.

1Co 9:18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

It was rewarding to Paul to "present the Gospel of Christ without charge." And it kept him from abusing his apostolic authority in that he could relate to the daily struggles of the believers - many of whom were stewards and slaves.

It wouldn't be a misuse of these verses to examine our own lives. Is there something I am doing, or that I am not doing, that is hindering the Gospel from being preached by me?

Better yet, ask: "Am I a self-driving Christian, or am I navigating by the Gospel, with Jesus piloting?"

#2 - Let The Gospel Determine When To Wave Your Rights In The World (v19-27)

Church planting is a commendable activity. But I think there is too much church planting where there are already churches.

That wasn't the case in the first century. Paul was pioneering churches - planting them where there were none by preaching the Gospel. In his travels he would encounter Jews first, then Gentiles. The two groups were wildly different. The Gospel is universal; Jesus is the Savior of all men. As the messenger of the Gospel, Paul had to fit in with both groups. He thus waved his rights accordingly.

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1Co 9:19 For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;

Paul was “free from all men” in the sense that he could live as he pleased among all men so long as he didn’t sin. He decided to exercise his freedom in an unusual way: By giving it up in order to serve all men.

1Co 9:20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law;

1Co 9:21 to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law;

1Co 9:22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some.

Paul had no problem being kosher around Jews. They were still “under the Law” of Moses.

They practiced circumcision, observed dietary restrictions, celebrated certain days on the calendar. Among them he could function “as under the Law.” He could respect their customs without adopting them as being necessary for salvation. He could participate to a point. He could limit certain liberties because he loved the Jews and wanted to see them get saved.

Those “without [the] Law” (of Moses) are the Gentiles. They are all non-Jews. Around them Paul was *not* Kosher. He did not insist they be circumcised or that they restrict their diet or that they observe certain holy days. He acted as if he were “without Law.” He meant that his behavior around Gentiles was not in strict outward conformity with the Law of Moses.

Around Christians who had a “weak” conscience about certain questionable things he limited his liberty.

In their case he didn’t need to “win” them to salvation. His use of “win” is in the sense of not seeing them stumbled in their walk.

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Note the phrase in parenthesis in verse twenty-one. No matter who he was around Paul never violated his own biblical morality and he never diluted or altered the message of the Gospel. His methods were adaptable, however, in order that Jesus might be glorified through his sharing of the Gospel.

1Co 9:23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.

It may require what seems to be sacrifice. But it is really a very small sacrifice because you embrace representing Jesus Christ as an ambassador as a great and precious privilege.

It is by those sacrifices of his liberty that Paul was “a partaker of” the Gospel. “Partake” can mean *participate*. He was more interested in participating with God and with Christians in sharing the Gospel than he was in participating in some personal liberty.

1Co 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*.

1Co 9:25 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*.

Corinth sponsored what was called the Isthmian Games. These contests were second only to the Olympics in Athens in terms of fame and popularity.

An athlete in training is “temperate in all things.” It means they exercise self-restraint in every area in order to be at their very best. They adjust their diet, their sleep cycles, and their social and personal calendars in order to be at their best.

1Co 9:26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air.

Paul made a funny. When he said, “not with uncertainty,” he pictured a runner who, upon hearing the “Go!” started running in the wrong direction. He didn’t have the finish line in view but ran all over the place. For emphasis he switched from the track to the ring. He pictured a boxer “beat[ing] the air.” He was not talking about shadowboxing. That’s a good training discipline. No, he was

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picturing a boxer coming out and throwing punches that never landed. All that's going to do is leave him exhausted.

1Co 9:27 But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

“Discipline” has the sense of self-denial. Like an athlete, he denied himself certain things among various groups in order to “win” people.

Paul didn't want to get to the end of his own “race” on the earth and be “disqualified.” He was thinking of his future meeting with Jesus Christ in Heaven after he died or was raptured as if it were like the Reward Seat of the Isthmian Games. There the victorious athlete would be given the laurel wreath and earn the praises of the judge.

Or he would be disqualified for any of a number of things! Let me point out that if the athlete was disqualified he would remain a citizen of Rome. We're not suggesting in any way that disqualification means you forfeit eternal life and are lost for eternity.

You might, however, forfeit your eternal rewards. And even before you get to the end of your race you will forfeit your effectiveness for Jesus and hinder your testimony.

A Calvary Chapel pastor, called to minister in Mexico, gave up his American citizenship to become a Mexican citizen. Extreme, but good example of what Paul was talking about.

Your destination is Heaven, by way of the Reward Seat of Jesus. Jesus needs to take the wheel; but you are to navigate. Do so by the Gospel - what will adorn it, not hinder it.

