

## **Denying Self** **1 Corinthians 9:1-18**

Good Morning.

If I said Christians have an enemy, most of us would say, of course, we know that Satan is the enemy of our soul.

After all, the Apostle Paul spoke about the Armor of God at length. But what if I told you there is another dangerous enemy of our faith that we fail to recognize at times, and that **is self.**

**Galatians 5** the flesh and the Spirit, are at war with one another.

Christianity is a paradox and even the strongest Christians forget this world is not our home; so we are to live contrary to the world

As Christ followers, we die to have real life, surrender to win, and the Christian who gives up everything, gains everything.

JB Cachila said “*Self-denial is a virtue that people through the ages have found hard, **if not impossible**, to do.*

*After all, everyone wants to be in the top spot, ahead of the pack.*

*While we might think of self-denial as a painful habit that denies us of our pleasures, the truth is that it gives us more than we could actually wish for.*

Please open your Bibles to **1 Corinthians 9** as we continue;

Last time Paul spoke about not causing other Christians to stumble while exercising Christian liberties.

The question was, “*Can we eat meat sacrificed to idols, because idols mean nothing and we know the Lord?*”

Some had great **knowledge**, but instead of building up weaker saints, they used this **knowledge** to puff up self. Some at Corinth felt free to eat at the pagan temple because idols were nothing.

But if your Christian **liberties** cause someone else to stumble, you are not seeking other people’s well-being.

Love always triumphs over **liberty**. Unity among Christians always triumphs over a Christian’s personal rights.

Today is a continuation from last week; the topic is self denial.

## **I. Paul’s status as an Apostle.**

Read *1 Corinthians 9:1-2*

Paul is continuing to speak about the freedom of eating meat that was sacrificed to idols...

Paul also said in *Galatians 5:13* ***For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. NKJV***

Prior to salvation Saul later called Paul, was a Pharisee of the highest rank and had all of the power and authority the flesh desired. Now as an Apostle, Paul again is in a high position.

Paul has been talking about Christian liberties, he is trying to show these believers though they have freedom in Christ; if they use it to feed to flesh; they are serving self and not Christ.

As followers of Christ, we are to live to satisfy Him, not ourselves. We are free in Christ, and part of that freedom is being free from the bondage of having to feed the flesh.

Paul is explaining how he laid down his **rights** as an Apostle so he asks the Corinthians to let go of their rights to eat meat sacrificed to idols and exercise love ahead of liberties.

Paul asks, "*Am I not an apostle?*" The original Apostles had a special commission to lay the foundation of the church.

The original Apostles were also given the ability to perform special signs and wonders to prove the message they preached.

Today, there are no Apostles in the **original** sense because the main criteria to be an Apostle like the original, is to **be called** by God to be one and to have **physically seen** the risen Christ.

*Acts 1:21 "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,*

*Acts 1:22 beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." NKJV*

Paul saw the risen Christ on the road to Damascus as the Lord revealed Himself to Paul (formerly Saul) in *Acts 9*.

Paul's rhetorical questions here, "*Am I not free?*"

Paul was not "*under authority*" to anyone but Jesus Christ, even though the different churches were under the Apostles' authority

Paul's next question, "*Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?*"

Paul confirms his experience was an authentic **appearance** of the post-resurrection Jesus; not merely a vision of Jesus.

Paul's next question, "*Are you not my work in the Lord?*"

The fruit that was produced from the different churches Paul was over was enough **proof** to show he was indeed an Apostle.

Wiersbe said, "*Paul considered the Corinthian church a very special "seal" of his ministry as an apostle. "Corinth was a difficult city to minister in, and yet Paul accomplished a great work because of the Lord's **enabling.**"*"

Paul taught the Corinthians all they knew about Jesus because he was obedient to his apostolic commission to go to Corinth.

Ray Stedman, "Paul is saying, "*If I am an apostle, and I have this knowledge that is greater than yours*" (as he will say in the next 20 verses), "*nevertheless I do not exercise all my rights.*"

## **II. Paul's rights as an Apostle.**

Read *1 Corinthians 9:3-6*

The words *defense* and *examine* in *verse 3*, are both legal words that were used in a court of law in Rome.

Paul is presenting a *defense* like he is on trial by these Christians

***“Do we have no right to eat and drink”***, Paul had the right to eat and drink at the expense of the churches he served.

This portion is Paul’s *defense* for a minister being financially supported by the congregation which he pastors.

The question I get asked on a regular basis is, *“Since you are a pastor, what do you do with the other 6 days in a week”*

I always joke and say, *“Pastors only work one day a week and that is only for an hour”*.

But Paul was a Tent maker by trade, so for most of his ministry, he didn’t rely on the Churches financial support.

***Acts 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.***

***Acts 18:2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.***

***Acts 18:3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.***

The “Theology of Work” website explains Paul’s tent making

*“Tent making has become a common metaphor for Christians who engage in a money-earning profession as a means to support what is often called “professional ministry.”*

*“The term “bi-vocational” is often used to indicate that two separate professions are involved, the **money-earning** one and the ministry one.”*

*“But Paul’s example shows that all aspects of human life should be a seamless witness. There is little room to draw **distinctions** between “professional ministry” and other forms of witness.”*

Paul’s next **defense**; the right to take along a believing wife.

Again, the Corinthian Christians would not mind him taking along a wife, but again, Paul is communicating the fact that the church should financially support a pastor’s family.

***As do the other apostles.*** Most of the other Apostles were married, and their wives traveled with them as they did ministry.

Peter was obviously married, which is ironic as the Roman Catholic Church called him the first pope, even though they have a principle of mandatory celibacy for priests.

In **verse 5**, Paul mentions the **brothers of the Lord**; who were James and Jude the half brothers of Jesus; and were married.

Notice Paul says, ***“Or is it only Barnabas and I”***

Paul had previously taught single people have more freedom in ministry than married people;

Some Apostles were married and **supported** by the church.

Paul and Barnabas were unique, choosing to support themselves, so no one could accuse them of preaching with wrong motives.

Contrary to what I would think; deciding to support themselves in ministry actually made Paul and Barnabas less respected among the Corinthian Christians.

Again, Paul had all the rights of any other Christian and the rights of an Apostle; but he denied himself these rights and freedoms, in order to further of the Gospel message.

### **III. The Old Testament is the example.**

Read *1 Corinthians 9:7-12*

Warren Wiersbe said, “*The Old Testament was the “Bible” of the early church, since the New Testament was in the process of being written.*”

“*The first believers found guidance in the spiritual principles of the law, even though they had been **liberated** from obeying the commandments of the law.*” (Warren Wiersbe)

Paul gives different examples of people who get paid to work...

Soldiers, farmers, and shepherds are all supported by their vocations; so it should be natural for the Corinthians that Paul has the right to be supported by the people he ministers to.

Paul also quotes from *Deuteronomy 25:4* in *verse 9*, "***You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.***

The Law of Moses was talking about humane treatment of animals; *how should the minister of the Gospel, be treated fairly.* Imagine not allowing a hungry ox to eat as he works in a field.

Paul says, *verse 9*, "***Is it oxen God is concerned about?***"

Paul is teaching *Deuteronomy* was established the principle that a minister has the right to be supported by the church.

As Wiersbe says, "*Since oxen cannot read, this verse was not written for them.*"

***vs. 10 he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope***

i.e. the person who works deserves to be provided for financially

***If we have sown spiritual things;*** same idea, the person who spiritually feeds people, deserves to be physically fed.

And again Paul points out, that others have enjoyed the benefits, so he and Barnabas deserved the same treatment...

Notice ***vs. 12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more?***

Paul denied himself to prevent the Gospel from being **hindered**.

#### **IV. Paul would not use the privilege.**

Read *1 Corinthians 9:13-18*

Paul wanted to be a great example of selflessness and never have anyone believe he was in the ministry for financial gain.

***2 Thessalonians 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;***

***2 Thessalonians 3:8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,***

***2 Thessalonians 3:9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.***

Paul gave the best example to these believers, not only how to financially support themselves, but also how they should do their part in the ministry for the Lord.

Paul would not use the ministry for personal gain or to manipulate Christians with a Gospel of greed.

Notice ***we have not used the right; lest we hinder the gospel***

Paul very clearly taught this church that supporting people in the ministry was essential but now he says he will not use that right, because he didn't want to hinder the ***Gospel of Christ***.

Paul seems to reiterate what he taught in ***1 Corinthians 8***, he gave up his liberties in Christ to prevent some from stumbling.

In the second letter Paul wrote this church and he says that he accepted financial support from other churches, even while refusing to accept support from them.

***2 Corinthians 11:8 I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. NKJV***

Even the Philippian church sent him two gifts when he went to Thessalonica.

Paul's heart was to share the Gospel and if there was a chance that the message would be distorted, Paul wanted to prevent that from happening.

Paul was willing to deny himself of many things for the sake of the Gospel and the Corinthian Christians.

The end of vs. 16, ***woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!***

David Guzik said, "*Paul's ministry was not just a matter of choice or personal ambition; it was something he was called to, something he had to do.*

*"He did not just have "preacher's itch." He was called to preach and felt compelled to fulfill that call."* (Guzik)

Notice, ***I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge***

Guzik said, "*In Paul's day, there were a lot of religious entrepreneurs, who preached any message to get money.*

*Paul distanced himself from these by never taking an offering so no one would think he might abuse [his] authority in the gospel.*

What a crying shame it is when people get into the ministry for financial gain.

There are so many abuses within different churches and what a black eye that is to Christianity. The Gospel of greed is evil.

These televangelists who tell people to give to get, will have to give an account of their actions someday to the chief Shepherd.

I can't tell you the number of times I have heard comments from people like, "All churches ever want is money"

Our goal is to glorify Christ, feed the sheep and reach people; the world sees the church as something that cares about money

This is why we do not pass an offering plate; because we believe giving should be between you and the Lord.

We only preach on giving when it specifically comes up within the text we happen to be studying on that particular day.

Again, Paul was willing to deny himself of many things for the sake of the Gospel and the Corinthian Christians.

## **V. Practical Application.**

Let's talk about self denial as a Christ follower; most of us know that Satan is the enemy of our soul.

But what if I told you there is another dangerous enemy of our faith that we fail to recognize at times, and that **is self.**

***Galatians 5*** the flesh and the Spirit, are at war with one another.

According to the Oxford dictionary, self-denial is the denial of one's own interests and needs; self-sacrifice; *but what does Christian “self-denial” mean?*

*Denying ourselves begins with surrendering to the Lord.*

Self-denial does not mean you stop being you; denying your talents or your personality.

We must have a healthy biblical view of who we are in Christ and how He loves us. We are accepted, forgiven, and adopted.

Self denial begins by removing me off the throne of my heart and placing the true King, Jesus Christ on His rightful throne.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said about self-denial: *“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” A follower of Jesus must be prepared to die if death is where the path of discipleship leads:*

Paul also said, ***Colossians 3:2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.***

***Colossians 3:3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. NKJV***

Once Jesus is on His rightful throne of my heart; I seek to please Him with my life choices.

As Jesus is on His rightful throne; I give up fleshly desires, empowered by His Holy Spirit.

People ruled by their own selfish desires will seek to satisfy the flesh without regard to the Holy Spirit's promptings.

Self-denial begins when we are made into a New Creation in Christ and we are given new desires.

Jesus tells us to deny ourselves, to subject our own desires and will to God's will; when we deny the flesh, the Lord will grant us Abundant Life as we enjoy deeper fellowship with Him.

***Matthew 16:24 Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.***

***Matthew 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.***

***Matthew 16:26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?***

***Matthew 16:27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. NKJV***

Kyle Idleman, "You must enter the narrowest of gates, travel the roughest of roads, carrying the cross as you are prepared to die.

*And if you do all that, sincerely following the steps of Jesus, the craziest thing will happen; you will actually find the one true life. The end of me is where real life begins."*

JB Cachila said “*While we might think of self-denial as a painful habit that denies us of our pleasures, the truth is that it gives us more than we could actually wish for.*”

Here are some takeaways from what Jesus said in *Matthew 16*

1. We deny ourselves so we can **follow** Christ. *Let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

Self-denial for any reason other than obeying and loving Christ will never give us the joy that only Christ can give.

2. Self-denial goes hand-in-hand with taking up our cross.

Paul said *in 1 Corinthians 15:31, "I die daily."* Taking up our cross to follow Christ will never happen without us denying ourselves of fleshly desires.

3. Self-denial allows us to find **real** life. *but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*

Contrary to how the world believes, denying ourselves to pursue a life in Christ actually helps us live the right kind of life – the life that God had intended for us to live.

Jesus said unless we lose our lives for His sake, we won't have life. It doesn't mean killing yourself or enslaving yourself to some ministry.

Rather, we will choose to pursue God's commands, which give the fulfilled abundant life.

We were created with a god-shaped hole in our life and only a life with Christ truly satisfies our souls. This is why rich and famous people are so miserable and unfulfilled.

Jesus satisfies our soul, not with a temporary fix, but with eternal, abundant life.

4. Self-denial helps **protect** our soul. *Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*

We know we are not saved by works or denying ourselves.

We are saved by the free gift of salvation because of Jesus' work on the cross...however, Living for the world instead of dying and receiving Christ has eternal consequences;

But serving the Lord preserves us, protects us, renews our mind, and gives us an eternal perspective.

Denying ourselves of any selfish desire and pursuing godliness with good works will enable us to receive more than what we could ever imagine

5. Self-denial brings eternal **rewards** in heaven.

*Matthew 16:27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. NKJV*

As we submit to the Holy Spirit, our desire will be to follow the Lord's ways and allowing the Holy Spirit to overrule our fleshly desires and find satisfaction in the things that will last in Christ.

I read an article that said, *“Surrender, is about turning to Christ and trusting in His power to progressively transform us and fulfill his purposes through us as we trust and obey His Word.*

*“It calls us to lose to our limited and potentially doomed selves and turning to the God who never fails.”*

The Lord loves you so much, so when He calls us to deny ourselves, it is for our own good.

The flesh and world entice us to crave harmful, selfish, fleshly things.

But the Lord created us as His own masterpiece, so he wants those things which are for our own good and blessings that will last forever.

If we die to self and live for Christ, we find ultimate fulfillment.