**The Church at Corinth**

**A Church Facing Inner Problems – #25**

**The Freedom of Paul the Apostle - Part Two**

**1 Corinthians 9:1-27**

***Class Dinner*** *– Next Wednesday, May 8, will be our end-of-semester class pitch-in dinner in the E91 Community Room at 6:30 p.m. (be there a little earlier if you’re bringing a dish). We will have food sign-up again in class this week. Or contact*

*Pam Walters about the dinner at nana.10554@yahoo.com or 317-727-7917 (cell).*

**The Rights of an Apostle**

***1 Corinthians 9:1*** *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the product of my work in the Lord?* ***2*** *If to others I am not an apostle, surely I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostolate in the Lord.*

***3*** *This is the defense I make before those who would pass judgment on me.*

***4*** *Do we not have the right to eat and drink?* ***5*** *Do we not have the right to bring along a Christian wife, as do the rest of the apostles, and the Lord’s brothers, and Cephas?* ***6*** *Or is it only I and Barnabas who do not have the right not to work?*

***7*** *Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Who shepherds a flock and does not drink of its milk?* ***8*** *Am I saying this merely from a human point of view, or does not the law also say the same thing?*

***9*** *For it stands written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while it is threshing.” Is God concerned about oxen?* ***10*** *Or does he really speak for our sake? For it was written for our sake, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher (thresh) in hope of receiving a share.* ***11*** *If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much that we should reap a material harvest from you?* ***12*** *If others share this rightful claim on you, should not we all the more so?*

*Yet we have not used this right. Rather, we put up with everything so as not to put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.* ***13*** *Do you not realize that those who are engaged in temple service eat [what] belongs to the temple, and those who minister at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?* ***14*** *In the same way the Lord too has ordered those who preach the gospel to get their living from the gospel.*

***15*** *I, however, have used none of these things. Nor do I write this that it may be done so in my case. I would rather die than have someone deprive me of my boast.* ***16*** *If I preach the gospel, there is no reason for me to boast. For compulsion lies upon me! Woe to me if I do not preach it.* ***17*** *If I do so willingly, I have recompense; but if I do so unwillingly, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.* ***18*** *What then is my recompense? That, when I preach, I may offer the gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my right in preaching the gospel.*

***19*** *For though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to all so that I may win over as many as possible.* ***20*** *To Jews I became like a Jew to win over Jews; to those under the law I became like one under the law – though I myself am not under the law – that I might win over those under the law.* ***21*** *To those without the law I became like one without the law – though I am not without God’s law, being under the law of Christ – that I might win over those without the law.* ***22*** *To the weak I became weak that I might win over the weak. I have become all things to all people that I might save at least some.* ***23*** *I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may have a share in it.*

***24*** *Do you not realize that all runners in the stadium run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run, then, so as to win.* ***25*** *Every athlete exercises self-control in every way; they do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.*  ***26*** *I at least do not run aimlessly; I do not box as if I were beating the air.* ***27*** *Rather, I pommel my body and subjugate it, lest in preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.*

**Remarkable Statements**

1. In verse 6:12 Paul said, “*For me all things are permissible*,” a kind of a motto, which Paul will comment on again in verse 10:23. It is one of the remarkable statements that a Christian has ever expressed about his own freedom. This motto has also been that of some Corinthian individuals in verse 8:7-12) who hanged on their “freedom” to eat idol meat in temples of pagan gods. Paul does not deny freedom and basically has agreed with them about the nonentity of the gods and the idols. Those who “*possess that kind of knowledge*,” can say with Paul, “*For me all things are permissible.*”
2. But such freedom has led others to question Paul’s right use of the title “apostle,” as he does in verses 1:1 and 4:9 of this letter. Paul was a latecomer to the community of the apostles that were selected by Jesus. They seem to have found it difficult to accept Paul as being equal or of the same level as the Jerusalem apostles (cf. 15:5-8). Paul has to propose himself as someone who is equal and thus to argue about his apostolic role. In any case, Paul in this chapter gives not only a defense of himself as an apostle (verse 3), but also proposes himself as someone with an apostolic “right” (exousia, verses 4–6, 12), who has chosen not to use it.
3. In the first section (9:1–18), Paul gives the reasons for his apostolic authority and the rights that flow from that status supported by Scripture and the command of the Lord; but he carefully explains why he has chosen freely to relinquish such rights.
4. In the second section (9:19-23), he presents himself free and subject to no one, but in love he is a slave, who has freely become all things to all people in the hope of saving some of them.
5. In the last section (9:24–27), he exhorts the Corinthian church to share his self-discipline as he freely seeks to attain his goal and to imitate him in relinquishing his right.

**Text Study**

**VERSE 1 –** *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?*

Paul’s reason for insisting on his apostolic status is that he has been a witness of the risen Christ, as he will assert this again in verse 15:8: “*he appeared to me.*” In Galatians 1:16, he wrote, God “w*as pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles.*” So Paul often recalled his call and the divine commission (cf. 2 Cor 11:5; 12:11-12; Rom 11:13). An apostle, according to Acts 1:22, has to be someone who has seen the risen Lord and thus is “a witness to the resurrection of Jesus.” According to Acts, Paul could not have been numbered among the Twelve and in fact is never so presented in the NT. Yet even Luke recorded that Paul had seen the Lord (Acts 9:17, 27; 22:14).

**VERSE 1 (cont.) –** *Are you not the product of my work in the Lord?*

Paul is referring to himself as the founder of the Corinthian church (recall 3:6, 10; 4:15). The “proclamation” that he has made in the midst of that congregation came “*with a demonstration of the Spirit and with power*” (2:4); that is his gifted “*work*.”

**VERSE 2 –** *If to others I am not an apostle, surely I am to you*.

Paul insists on this status, as he does in Galatians 1:1 and 2 Cor 3:1-2). Who are the “others” who have asked the question? These “others,” however, seem to be among the rival groups of (chapters 1-4) or members of some such local church. There is no evidence that Paul is referring to Cephas or Apollos as the ones put forward this question.

**VERSE 2 (cont.) –** *For you are the seal of my apostolate in the Lord.*

“Seal” is a common Greek work (***sphragis***), and a seal was added to a document to certify it or to prove the ownership of a property. We have received the “seal” of the Holy Spirit, “*In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory*” (Eph 1:13-14). The Christians of Corinth are themselves the authentic proof and the “seal” that Paul has carried out among them his authorized mission as an “apostle.”

**VERSE 3 –** *This is the defense I make before those who would pass judgment on me*. Those “passing judgment” directly refers to the “others” of verse 2. Paul used two forensic terms in this verse, ***apologia***, “defense,” as he speaks on his own behalf (compare its use in (Acts 25:16; 2 Tim 4:16), and ***anakrins***, “conduct a judicial hearing or examination,” as he mentions those who pass judgment (cf. Luke 23:14; Acts 24:8).

**A Note from Philemon**

“Self-defense is not denied at all but what we need to examine not its legality but its reasons, and the way it is done”

**VERSE 4 –** *Do we not have the right to eat and drink?*

Paul sets forth the following questions. Paul’s first concern is his freedom to eat and drink as he pleases; a right that he has willingly restricted already in (8:13) this is his natural right.

**VERSE 5 –** *Do we not have a right to bring along a Christian wife?*

Or “*a woman who is a believer?*” Literally, “*A sister (as) a wife/woman.*” “Sister” means not a female sibling but a female fellow Christian (see cf. 7:15; Rom 16:1; Phlm 2). Examples of such husband-wife pairs would be Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:3) and Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7).

Clement of Alexandria had a different understanding of the words: “They [the Apostles], in conformity with their ministry, concentrated without distraction on preaching, and took their women as sisters, not as wives, to be their fellow-ministers for house-wives, through whom the teaching about the Lord penetrated into the women’s quarters without scandal” (Stromateis 3.6.53.3; Similarly, Augustine, *On the Works of the Monks*, 4). This is a possible meaning, but it seems to read more into the matter than the Greek text expresses.

**VERSE 5 (cont.) –** *As do the rest of the apostles*.

Certainly the phrase does not mean all the apostles, but as Paul did not mention the names, it is hard to say who these are. This is not uncommon. “The testimony of Papias,” recorded in Eusebius, HE 3.39.9, about the marital status of “Philip the Apostle” (and his daughters) is a classic confusion of “Philip the evangelist,” known from Acts 6:5; 8:5-13, 26-40; 21:8-9, with one of the Twelve having the same name (Acts 1:13), about whom nothing is known, apart from what is recounted in John 12:21–22.

**Barnabas**

**VERSE 6 –** *Or is it only I and Barnabas who do not have the right not to work?*

Paul added “Barnabas” who must have been known to the Corinthians would know The Greek word ***ergazesthai***, “work,” means “to toil, and to work with one’s hands.” It is a form of labor that was not commonly done by one who was a teacher. This reference to Barnabas was written from Ephesus toward the end of Paul’s third missionary journey, and the way Paul refers to him implies that they are still good friends. From Acts 4:36 one learns that his name was Joseph and that he was called Barnabas by the apostles, with a Lucan explanation of its meaning (see Acts, 320–21). Thereafter in the Lucan account of Paul’s missionary journeys, Barnabas is a companion and co-worker of Paul (9:27; 11:22, 30; 12:25), especially during the first mission (13:1, 2, 7, 43, 46, 50; 14:12, 14, 20), at the “Council” (15:2, 12), and in Antioch (11:15–26; 15:22, 25, 35). When Paul decides after the “Council” to set out on the second mission, there is a break between them over the conduct of John Mark (15:36-39), after which one hears no more about Barnabas, until he appears in Eusebius, *History of the Church* 1.12.1; 2.1.4 (where he is said to have been one of the Seventy disciples sent out by Jesus); 2.3.3; 2.8.2; 7.25.15 (as a coworker of Paul). There is a letter named after Barnabas listed by Eusebius among the non-canonical writings that were not part of the NT (History of the Church 3.35.4).

**VERSE 7 –** *Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?*

Or “*with his own rations?*” The Greek word originally referred to cooked rations given to soldiers, but in time it came to connote the money given for the purchase of such rations. The Christian apostle is compared with a soldier serving his country in time of war, who does not have to provide for his own rations, meals, or means of livelihood, but has a right to such sustenance from the country’s government. (Cf. 2 Tim 2:4-6; and contrast 2 Thess 3:6-12)

**VERSE 7 (cont.) –** *Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit?*

This is a second comparison of the apostle with a vintner and it echoes Deuteronomy 20:6, “*What man is there that has planted a vineyard and has not enjoyed its fruit?*” Cf. Prov 27:18, “*Even the vintner has a right to the fruit of the vine.*”

**VERSE 7 (cont.) –** *Who shepherds a flock and does not drink of its milk?*

Literally “of the milk of the flock.” This is Paul’s third comparison of the apostle with a shepherd.

**VERSE 8 –** *Am I saying this merely from a human point of view, or does not the law also say the same thing?*

Paul’s defense goes to the Torah that is to a legal and biblical one. The Law is the same as in 14:34 and Galatians 4:21, that is, the Mosaic Law.

**VERSE 9 –** *For it stands written in the law of Moses* …

This is the only occurrence of this phrase in Pauline writings. (But for the NT see Luke 2:22; 24:44; John 7:23; Acts 13:38; 15:5; 28:23; Heb 10:28.)

**VERSE 9 (cont.) –** *You shall not muzzle the ox while it is threshing.*

Paul cites Deuteronomy 25:4, which in the LXX reads, “*you shall not muzzle a threshing ox.*” The Mosaic Law prescribed that the farmer should not prevent an ox from enjoying the benefits of its threshing work [you see, a muzzled ox cannot eat]. This is a kindness to the working animal. (Jewish interpreters extended the provision: Josephus alludes to the same text, Ant. 4.8.21 §233, when he explains Deuteronomy 24:19, about harvesters leaving sheaves for sojourners, the fatherless, and widows and about having regard for the support of other human beings.

**VERSE 9 (cont.) –** *Is God concerned about oxen?*

Because of his Jewish background, Paul would cite Hebrew scripture depicting God’s concern for animals (e.g., Ps 104:14, 21, 27); yet in this context he also gives notice to the prohibition of Deuteronomy 25:4. The point? If God cares for animals, he cares more for human beings.

**VERSE 10 –** *Or does he really speak for our sake?*

That is, for us. It was written for our sake.

**VERSE 10 (cont.) –** *Because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher (thresh) in hope of receiving a share*.

Some commentators, however, try to explain the words as a citation of LXX Sirach 6:19, “*Approach her as the plowman and sower, and await her good fruits.*” That may have some similarity, but it is hardly the source of Paul’s words.

**VERSE 11 –** *If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much that we should reap a material harvest from you?*

Paul contrasts the “spiritual” with the “material” (cf. 3:1, Rom 15:27, where he uses the contrast of the same two terms in speaking about the contributions of the Gentile Christians of Macedonia and Achaia for the poor of the Jerusalem community). The “spiritual” is the seed of the Gospel that has led to spiritual benefits for the Christians there, but what material things he might have gained from them, yet never took, were insignificant in comparison.

**A Note from Philemon**

“St. Paul called the word of the Gospel and the teaching “spiritual” because it opens the heart for the Holy Spirit.”

**VERSE 12 –** *If others share this rightful claim on you, should not we all the more so?*

Again the “others” were such preachers as Apollos (1:12; 3:4, 22), Cephas (1:12; 3:22), or even Timothy (4:17), whom the Corinthian Christians may have supported materially. If the church supported them when they worked at Corinth, what sort of blame can they say about the one who did not ask for material support?

**VERSE 13 –** *Do you not realize that those who are engaged in temple service eat [what] belongs to the temple, and those who minister at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?*

Paul argues again from the Law. He is no longer a comparing himself with soldiers, vintners, or shepherds, but now with temple ministers of the OT. The OT regulations gave portions of sacrifices for priests in the tent of meeting and later in the Jerusalem Temple (Num 18:8-20), and also tithes for the Levites (Num 18:21–24; cf. Deut 18:1–5).

**VERSE 14 –** *In the same way the Lord too has ordered those who preach the gospel to get their living from the gospel*.

Literally, “to live from the gospel.” Paul introduces a further argument drawn from the authority of the Lord Jesus who said to disciples sent out during his earthly ministry, “*Stay at that one house, eating and drinking what they have, for the laborer deserves his pay.*” Here Paul echoes the form of the saying in the missionary discourse of the Lucan Gospel (Luke 10:7;) Matt 10:10).

**VERSE 15 –** *I, however, have used none of these things*.

“Used” is often translated as “right(s)” (see, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NAB, NIV). The reference is for material support.

**VERSE 15 (cont.) –** *Nor do I write this that it may be done so in my case.*

Paul seeks no provision for himself. Paul does not want to draw his non-use of support to the attention of the Corinthian Christians so that they may think of supporting him in the future.

**VERSE 15 (cont.) –** *I would rather die than have someone deprive me of my boast*.

**A Note from Philemon**

St Paul was not projecting any sense of pride; to boast for him was in the Lord (2 Cor 10:17;[1 Cor 1:31](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Corinthians%201.31)), where Paul (quoting [Jer 9:24](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jeremiah%209.24)) says, “*Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.*” It may seem strange to think of boasting as good; after all, the word *boast* means “to puff oneself up in speech,” and pride is condemned in Scripture (e.g., [Prov 11:2](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Proverbs%2011.2)). Paul is obviously not talking about sinful boasting. Jesus did not teach us to boast in what we possess”

**Boasting and Prosperity Gospel**

Some preachers have twisted the meaning of the phrase “boast in the Lord” to support a misleading message. The phrase is commonly heard today in the [prosperity gospel](http://www.gotquestions.org/prosperity-gospel.html) and [Word of Faith](http://www.gotquestions.org/Word-Faith.html) movements. Often, it is quoted from [Psalm 34:2](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Psalm%2034.2) (KJV), “*My soul shall make her boast in the Lord,*” and it is used in the context of boasting about worldly possessions or of speaking a miracle into existence. The idea is that if you have a material need, then you should “boast” that you already have that need met. Such boasting is a proof of faith (so they say), and that faith will glorify God as your “word of confession” speaks a blessing into existence. This is most decidedly *not* what David and Paul meant. Paul’s statement about boasting in the Lord has nothing to do with worldly possessions or with altering reality. The context concerns God’s ability to glorify Himself even in our weakness. When called to salvation, “*not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption*” ([2 Cor 1:26-30](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Corinthians%201.26-30)). Whatever good may come from our ministry, we have no reason to boast because, humanly speaking, we are “weak,” “foolish,” “lowly,” and “despised.” All the glory goes to God and God alone (see [Isa 42:8](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isaiah%2042.8)).

**Boasting *of* the Lord**

True boasting in the Lord is actually boasting *of* the Lord – boasting of His great attributes, boasting of what He has done for us, of what He is still doing and of what He has promised to do. As [Jeremiah 9:23-24](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jeremiah%209.23-24) says, “*Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,’ declares the Lord.”*

**VERSE 16 –** *If I preach the gospel, there is no reason for me to boast. Necessity (or compulsion) lies upon me! Woe to me if I do not preach it!*

There can be no boasting in what one has to do, and Paul must preach the gospel. This “compulsion” (***ananke***) is not merely a psychological condition; it expresses a compulsion exercised on Paul from outside. “***Ananke*** *lies upon me.*” This is a hint to the road to Damascus experience. Paul is not looking back on what happened in the past and on its effects, but speaking of his mission in the present and his calling. His commission, and the compulsion arising out of it, originates with hearing the voice of the Lord. In the Old Testament, “*Woe is me*” stands as an antithesis to the Pauline “***Ananke*** *lies upon me*.” This acts as a reminder that “woe,” both in the Old and New Testaments can signify a personification of the divine judgment. Paul’s words about this need to preach the gospel echo those of Jeremiah and his need to proclaim God’s word (Jer 1:6-7; 20:9); also Amos’s words (3:8). ***Ananke*** denotes here the power of the divine will, which radically and successfully challenges man and makes its servant its instrument. Paul as a convert uses the OT, “*woe to me,*” (LXX Hos 9:12; LXX Jer 15:10; and Isa 6:5, which becomes in the LXX, “*O wretch that I am.*”

**VERSE 17 –** *If I do so willingly, I have a recompense …*

Paul used a financial term ***misthos***, and “remuneration for work done.” That remuneration is neither an the end of time nor the material support of the Corinthian community, but rather the satisfaction of doing what he is expected to do.

**VERSE 17 (cont.) –** *But if I do so unwillingly, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.*

I.e., what I have in such a case is a stewardship with which I have been entrusted: something that I am expected to carry out with fidelity. Paul’s sentiment seems to be like that of Luke 17:10, “*So you too should say, when you have done all that is commanded you, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have only done what we were supposed to do.’* ”

**VERSE 18 –** *What then is my recompense? That, when I preach, I may offer the gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my right in preaching the gospel.*

This verse is the logical culmination of Paul’s defense. He must preach the gospel; that is the “stewardship” (***oikonomia***) with which he has been entrusted; but he is under no obligation to preach it “free of charge” (***adapanon***), as he has been doing (cf. 2 Cor 11:7). In so acting, he has a reason for his “boast” and this is his “recompense.”

**Paul the Free Apostle**

**VERSE 19 –** *For though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to all so that I may win over as many as possible*.

Literally, “being free of all, to all have I enslaved myself that I might gain the more.”

1. Paul is hardly referring to his freedom as a Roman citizen, which he never mentions in any of his letters. What he has in mind according to his words is basic freedom, the independence from all other human beings.
2. Paul has submitted himself to the service of others to win over as many of them as possible to the Christian gospel and to Christ Jesus. This is a global statement using “all,” that is all ethnic groups, Jews, and Gentiles, slaves and free, to “win over” to Christ.
3. The use of the Greek ***kerdaine*** (“win over)” as a missionary term has the sense of “gaining, winning over” someone for the kingdom. So “to win over” means to “bring them closer to Christ’s way”

**A Note from Philemon**

When St. Paul says that he is free and does not belong to any one, he has freed himself from:

1. The righteousness of the Law,

2. His former life he counted as “rubbish”,

3. He called himself the slave of Jesus Christ.

Such a man is totally free, because he has one Master, the Lord Jesus. Have that one Master and you will be free because Jesus will free you from the power of lust, and heal your love so that you learn how to be true to your love, and when you say the truth, you have nothing to fear because the Master Jesus does not allow his salves to have a divided life.”

**Paul’s Enslavement**

Paul’s argument becomes a parallel to what he said I verse 8:9-13. A chiasmus *[a reversal of words in a phrase – ed.]* exists in the Greek text that can be seen in a literal English version: “*free of all – to all have I enslaved myself.*”

**A Note from Philemon**

“*Free of all*” means Paul has no favorites. Being a Jew, he preached to the Gentiles without hesitation. Have no favorite friend and treat all as equal and that makes you able to be the slave of all, just like our beloved Jesus Christ who took the “*form of a slave*” (Phil 2:6) to love all humans as equals.

**VERSE 20 –** *To Jews I became like a Jew to win over Jews*.

Paul is referring to either Jewish Christians or Judaizers who would consider themselves to be under the Law. It is rather strange that Paul now says, “*I became like a Jew*.” He undoubtedly means that he not only lived with them but also followed Jewish practices of the Mosaic Law, even though it is not easy to explain specifically what these might have been from any of his writings. Paul evangelized Jews and this implied (in 2 Cor 11:24) where he speaks of having “*received at the hands of Jews the forty lashes less one*,” where according to the Mishnah that Paul must have broken the Law. This suggests that Paul suffered as a Christian, but he never tells us for what reasons he experienced such synagogue floggings. See in the later rabbinic tradition.

In any case, the following clause explains the sense in which the Christian Paul now means his becoming “*like a Jew.*” In Acts, however, Luke depicts the converted Paul so observing Jewish practices (having Timothy circumcised 16:1-3); cutting his hair as a Nazirite who has a vow (Acts18: 18); and purifying himself in the Jerusalem Temple (Acts 21:23-26). Paul himself recognized at times the privileged situation of his former religions life as one who belong to God’s people and plan of salvation (Rom 1:16; 2:9: “*the Jew first but also the Greek*”), which explains why he is depicted often by Luke going first to the Jewish synagogue on his arrival in a new town to begin his evangelization of it (13:5, 14, 46; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4).

**VERSE 20 (cont.) –** *To those under the law I became like one under the law*.

“Those under the law” are the Jews (Gal 4:5), and the opposite, “those not under the law,” refers to the converts to Christianity (Gal 5:18; Rom 6:14-15).

**VERSE 20 (cont.) –** *Though I myself am not under the law*.

This is important for our understanding of Galatians 2:15-16, where Paul speaks of himself and Cephas, “*We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, know that a human being is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.*” Paul can define his relation to the law as he does here; to be justified by faith in Christ frees Paul from obligations to observe the Mosaic Law and its entire works.

**VERSE 20 (cont.) –** *That I might win over those under the law*.

Paul says the same in Romans 11:13–14, “*I make much of this ministry of mine in the hope that I may stir up my own people* (literally, my own flesh) *to jealousy and save some of them.*”

**VERSE 21 –** *To those without the law I became like one without the law.*

I.e., like Gentiles, or literally like the “Greeks” (1:22), with no obligation to observe the Mosaic Law. Paul himself could not be “lawless” as the next clause will make clear, but he became like those who were “lawless.” This statement merely formulates his conviction as “*apostle of the Gentiles*” (Rom 11:13), a conviction explained in Galatians 2:19-20: “*Through the law I died to the law, that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*”

**Died to the Law**

1. Four times Paul uses words that are compounds of nomos, “law,” which refers in this passage to the Mosaic Law. He begins by referring to Gentiles as people who are anomoi, “lawless,” i.e., “without the (Mosaic) law,” and identifies himself also as anomos in the same sense; but then he denies that he is anomos, “lawless,” i.e., one who rejects all law in the sight of God, because he is, “in/under the law of Christ,” a law different from that of Moses.
2. We can understand Paul correctly if we remember:

a. That the Law is no longer the ‘mediator’ but Christ is the Mediator,

b. The prescriptions of the Torah and all its regulations don’t create any form of worship,

c. The New Creation in Christ moved away from the old systems to new life.

**A Note from Philemon**

Watch your heart more than anything you ever watch for if you think that you need to do something to make God be delighted in you, be sure my brother that you have not been living as a Christian. Do you know why I say this? Because only in Christ and in Christ alone God the Father is eternally delighted in us.”

**The Law of Christ**

**VERSE 21 (cont.) –** *Though I am not without God’s law, being under the law of Christ*.

Paul sees himself bound to Christ in some sense as Christ himself, for the Law of Christ (Gal 6:2) which Paul fulfills is that of the great love embedded in the Two Great Commandments. To understand this, we have to look into the whole letters.

1. The Law of Christ is what Paul has written about Christ and faith in him that he regards as the response to “God’s gospel” (Rom 1:1).

2. In Galatians 5:6, Paul speaks of faith “*working itself out through love*,” and in Romans 13:8-10, it is love that works in life: “*the one who loves another has fulfilled the law … Love does no wrong to a neighbor, for love is the fulfillment of the law.”*

3. Although “law” refers again to the Mosaic law (quoted in 1 Cor 13:9), it can be seen that Christian love, which springs from faith, and to which Paul will devote chapter 13, institutes “the law of Christ,” “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2), or “the law of faith” (Rom 3:27), which is the “principle” of faith.

So it is not to be understood as a legal code; nor is it the Mosaic Law, under the facet of Christ, but it is only “law” that is the way Christ exercises his Lordship over those who are have new received life from Christ.

**VERSE 21 (cont.) –** *That I might win over those without the law*.

To win over Gentiles to Christ Jesus.

**To Win the Weak**

**VERSE 22 –** *To the weak I became weak; that I might win over the weak.*

The “weak” are those weak in conscience about idol meat (8:7-13); but it might perhaps be understood in a broader sense, as Paul will use the term in Romans 14:1; 15:1), they are Christians who have not yet fully liberated from legalism.

1. The “weak,” then, would be like those mentioned in Romans 5:6, “*While we were still helpless Christ died … for the godless,*” i.e., those powerless to achieve salvation for themselves.

2. The “weak” people are to be found not only in Corinth; they could be found elsewhere. When Paul says, “*I became weak*” he did not say “as” or “like.” Paul is giving up his right to be “strong,” and it might even mean that Paul is abasing himself socially as he identifies himself with those mentioned (1 Cor 1:27), or more likely, even considering himself theologically one of the godless in order to win the different groups over to Christ.

**The Burden of the Apostle**

**VERSE 22 (cont.) –** *I have become all things to all people that I might save at least some*.

Or “that by all means I might save some.” Paul here formulates his fundamental principle in evangelization, whether those he would win over be weak or knowing, Jew or Greek, slave or free. Paul illustrates his principle. His love and concern for the salvation of “all” has no boundaries, no matter what their social or ethnic condition or religious background.

**VERSE 23 –** *I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may have a share in it*.

Or “so that I may become a sharer in the gospel or participant in its benefits.” The preaching of the gospel and its progress is for Paul life (see 1:17 and 1 Thess 2:2). His loves can and must renounce his rights, however well founded his rights may be.

**Paul the Athlete**

**VERSE 24 –** *Do you not realize that all runners in the stadium run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run, then, so as to win.*

Another consideration of the way Paul’s freedom has been restricted: it is drawn from the discipline needed in athletic contests. The Greek verb ***trecho***, “run,” is taken from foot racing in a stadium, and ***brabeion*** means “prize, award” that an athletic is seeking in a contest. Paul makes use of this comparison in respect to the demands of the gospel in his own life, just as the runner must in a race. (Cf. Phil 3:14; 2 Tim 4:7).

**VERSE 25 –** *Every athlete exercises self-control in every way*.

Although the verb ***enkrateuomai*** means “self-control” in sexual life (as in 1 Cor 7:9), it is used here in a context of a more generic sense of self-control, such as would be demanded by athletic contests.

**VERSE 25 (cont.) –** *They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one*. The victory crown, ***stephanos***, at the Games was a wreath made of either pine needles or wild celery, and in the first century A.D., most likely of the latter (Oscar Broneer, *The Apostle Paul and the Isthmian Games,*” in Biblical Archaeologist 25, 1961, 16-17). Paul’s goal is a crown that does not wither. Polycarp the Martyr (AD 69-155), was a second-century [Christian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian) [bishop of Smyrna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop_of_Smyrna). According to the [*Martyrdom of Polycarp*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martyrdom_of_Polycarp) he died a [martyr](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martyr), bound and burned at the stake, then stabbed when the fire failed to touch him. He has won “*the crown of immortality.*”

**VERSE 26-27 –** *I at least do not run aimlessly; I do not box as if I were beating the air*. Or, “I at least run as not without purpose, I so box, as one not beating air.” So Paul applies the sports metaphor to himself in the contest in which he is engaged, as he preaches the gospel. He shifts the image of himself from a runner in a race to another kindred strenuous athlete, that of a boxer in a ring, as he employs the Greek verb ***pykteuo*** “box,” i.e., strike “with the fist.” The boxing may not involve another boxer, as the next verse suggests.

**VERSE 27 –** *Rather, I pommel my body and subjugate it, lest in preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.*

Literally “I strike under the eye,” ***hypopiazo***, which actually means to give (someone) a black eye. But here it has “my body” as its object, a strange combination; and it is followed by an equally strange verb with the same object, “I lead (my body) into slavery,” ***doulagogo***. The vivid athletic images express the self-restraint and discipline necessary to achieve a goal, and these he applies to his apostolic duty.

***Pope’s Notes***

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