Giving Up to Gain
1 Corinthians 9:19-27
1837

Now, in I Corinthians chapter 9 we want to look at verses 19 to 27, this morning, as we continue to study this really, really exciting letter. And I want to begin by just sharing with you a little study that I got involved in this week. I was thinking through the whole subject of evangelism because Paul in this passage talks about winning people. In verse 19, at the end, "That I might gain the more." In verse 20, "That I might gain the Jews." Later in verse 20, "That I might gain them that are under the law." In verse 21, "That I might gain them that are without law." In verse 22, "That I might gain the weak."

He continually talks about this. He talks about running to obtain. He talks about a reward. He's got something in mind. And what he has in mind here is winning people to Christ, that's the objective of this whole passage. And so as I was thinking about this aspect of Paul's ministry, the aspect of evangelism which incidentally is only one facet of a multiple ministry that he had of discipling and building churches and training leaders and doing many, many things, but really the heart of everything was this area of winning people to Christ. And as I was thinking it through I thought it might be helpful for all of us if we could get a handle on the reasons why he was so effective. And I drew together several reasons why I believe the Apostle Paul was effective in evangelism. And I think all of these are translatable into anybody's life.

First of all, he had the right message. One of the reasons people are not effective in evangelism is because they really don't know what the message is. They're not sure about the content of the gospel. Or they're afraid to get into a conver-sation because somebody will get them away from what they know and ask them something they don't know and they'll be hung. And so, Paul was effective because he really knew the message.

In I Corinthians 15 he said, "The gospel was delivered unto him," how that the Lord Jesus died and the third day He rose again, and he went through all of that. He knew the message.

The second thing that made Paul effective in ... in missions or in evangelism was that he had a compelling motive. He said in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive for the things done in the body whether they be worthless or valuable. In other words, he knew he was going to face the record of his life and his service. And later on he said in the same chapter, the love of Christ constrained him. So he had deep motives. The desire out of love for Christ to someday meet Christ and have Christ say - Well done, Paul.

There was a third thing and that is he had a sense of a divine call. In chapter 9, right there where you are, in verse 16 he said, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." Necessity is laid upon me. He knew God had called him. He knew God had commissioned him. He knew that he was simply called upon to obey a divine call, it occurred on the Damascus Road.

In I Timothy chapter 1, he kind of reiterates that, he ... he says - "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who enabled me in that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious, but I obtained mercy." And that's the great testimony that he gave all through his life that God had just picked him up and put him in the ministry. He had a sense of the divine call to evangelize.

Fourthly, he was successful because he had a great boldness. In Romans 1:16 he said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, the Jew first and also to the Gentile." And this tremendous boldness that enabled him to say, "For to

me to live is Christ and to die is gain," was one other reason for his success.
A fifth, he had the energizing of the Holy Spirit. He knew what it was to walk in the Spirit. He knew what it was to be being kept filled with the Spirit. He knew what it was to obey the Spirit. He knew what it was to avoid quenching or grieving the Spirit. So he saw experientially the power of the Spirit of God in his life. From Acts 13 where the Holy Spirit said, "Separate unto Me, Paul and Barnabas, for the work which I have called them to," right on through his life he always experienced the power of the Holy Spirit.
A sixth reason that he was successful in evangelism was that he had a strategy. He was able to take all of these spiritual realities and funnel them through a method, funnel them through an approach that worked. And you remember if you read Acts 18 and his ministry in Corinth that you have a sample there of how he worked. First he went to the synagogue, won some people to Christ and then he had a coterie of co-evangelists and they attacked the Gentile community. But he had that same strategy everywhere he went. He had a method. He had an approach. He had mapped out a way to go and how to get there.
Seventhly, and I think this is important, we see it in him again and again, he had an unwavering desire to see people saved. He loved people. He cared that people not go to hell. I mean, he really cared. He cared that they come to Christ. He said in Romans 1 - "I am a debtor." In other words, I owe them a debt because I know something they desperately need to know, that makes me responsible to tell them. I see them on a path to doom and I know the answer that can change that and I owe them, at least, the message. What they do with it may be their prerogative. What I do with it is a debt.
And then he had one more, I think, ingredient that made him just amazingly successful and that is the thing we see in I Corinthians 9:19 to 27. He had decided to sacrifice anything and everything in his life if it might mean he could win more people to Christ. He was willing to set aside everything to win people. So here is a man who is successful in evangelism. He has the right message. He has the deep motive of love for Christ. He has a sense of the divine call. He has a great boldness. He has the energizing of the Spirit. He has a strategy. He has a great desire to see people saved. And lastly, and capping it all off, he would do anything to see that happen ... anything. And that brings us to this text.
Verse 19, look at it, we'll elucidate this very point. "For though I am free from all yet have I made myself a slave unto all that I might gain the more." I would absolutely do anything to win people to Christ. Now that's the heart of this text...that I might gain the more. Verse 20: "That I might gain the Jews," again verse 20, "That I might gain them that are under the law." Verse 21, "That I might gain them that are without law." Verse 22, "That I might gain the weak." This is the point ... to win people to Christ is the point. That's what he's saying.
Now he's illustrating a principle to the Corinthians and it is the principle that love limits our liberty. And we've seen it delineated already in chapter 8 and chapter 9 through verse 18. They were wondering whether a Christian should just go do whatever he felt he had the freedom to do and Paul says - No...no, you have the freedom to do some things technically but if you do them you're going to make somebody else stumble and you ought to limit your freedom by your love for that somebody. That's the whole point here. And that's what he's saying in verse 19, - That's what I do, I am free to do whatever I want but I make myself a slave unto everybody in order to win them. I will set aside my liberty to win somebody to Christ. If somebody gets offended with something in my life I'll stop that something whatever it is. I won't do it in order that I might be inoffensive, in order that I might win them to Christ. That's what he's saying.
It all came about because the Corinthians were asking him a question whether they should eat meat offered to idols and he said - Well, it's not wrong in itself but it's wrong if when you do that you offend other Christians, or if you do that and other people think that that's wrong then you have really put yourself in a wrong position. Even doing something that in itself isn't wrong. But that isn't the issue,

he says, out of that one little issue of meats offered to idols he draws a principle that's applicable for all time and it's this - the Christian has a gray area between right and wrong where he has the freedom to do things and he can do them, technically, but he has to guide whether he does them or not by the fact of how they will affect somebody else. And that's behind what he says in verse 19. And here he begins to explain his own attitude toward this principle.

He says - Basically there are two crucial items that will make you able to limit your liberty, one is self-denial and the other is self-control. And really, they're very much the same. But he's going to show that in order for us as Christians to be able to say - Hey, I have the liberty to do that, I have the freedom to do that, that is not sin in the Bible, that is not something that is forbidden, I can do that if I want to do that. And at the same time say - But I don't want to do that cause it might offend somebody. In order for us to really be willing to do that we're going to have to exercise self-denial, first of all, and, secondly, self-control.

Let's look first of all at self-denial in verses 19 to 23. And this just simply restates the same principle from different illustrations. Verse 19: "For though I am free from all men." In other words, he is saying - Look, I have learned that a relationship to God is not a relationship related in any sense to ritual. It is not a relationship related in any sense to custom, or to tradition, or to ceremonies. So, I am not bound to keep Jewish ceremonies. And he's talking about the ceremonial thing. I'm not bound to maintain the Sabbath day. I am not bound to eat certain things and not eat certain other things. I am not bound to certain patterns of cooking and certain patterns of new moons and feasts and etc. etc. etc. I am no longer circumscribed to Jewish ceremony and Jewish tradition. On the other hand, I am free from all ceremony of Gentile tradition as well. I am free from all the routines and the rituals of Gentile life. I am free in the fact that I have a relationship to God that is based on the work of Jesus Christ and that is personal and internal and separate from all external. I have the liberty then to reject all ceremony and all externals and all side issues.

And that's right, isn't it? That is absolutely the truth. He has that freedom, and so do you and so do I. He is saying... the word from there is literally in the Greek out of - I am free out of all...all. I am free out of all. I've been taken out of all of those kinds of constraints. Like every Christian I'm free to enjoy that liberty. I can do just about what I want, technically speaking. I have no need to yield to human opinion. I have no need to yield to custom or ceremony. Yet...and here's the key ... yet, I have made myself a slave unto all. Isn't that interesting? That's very paradoxical. He doesn't have to, technically, but he has. He is free, yet a slave. That is a paradox. But it's not an...an uncommon paradox. If you go back to Exodus 21 in the first six verses, I'll just comment on it, it says that if a slave reaches the place where he has the right to be freed and you say - You're free - he also has the right to come back to you and say - But I don't want to be free, I love you, my service to you is not an act of obedience nearly as much as it is an act of love, could I stay? Then Exodus 21 says - "Take your slave over to the doorpost, put his ear against the door and take an awl and pound a hole through his ear." And once the hole is in his ear, he has a sign for all to see that he serves out of love, not because he has to but because he wants to. He is really free, free to choose. That's all Paul is saying. He, as it were, spiritually has a hole in his ear. I don't have to do this, he says, but I want to do it because I love you.

Now the word there - to enslave - the verb, to make yourself a slave, is very strong. It is the same word used in I Corinthians 7:15 in relation to the marriage bond. It is the same word used in Romans 6:18 and 22 to speak of our union with Christ. So, it is a vitally important word. It is a word of the very tightest kind of union. He is saying - I will just put myself up against you and do whatever it requires to reach you, to minister to you, to meet your needs. He's truly a slave. He is denying himself in the truest sense, he follows the pattern of Jesus who said: "Whoever would be chief among you let him be your ... what? ... your servant," Mark 10:44. And that's precisely what Jesus was, for in the next verse it says: "I even came not to be served, literally, but to serve and give My life a ransom for many."

So, Paul says I'm willing to sacrifice everything to be your servant. People often ask me - Well, how far does this go, John? It goes just as far as it needs to go to reach somebody. How many things do you set aside to reach somebody? Anything that stands in the way. Now that's clear, and Paul gives the reason in verse 19.

Here's a purpose clause, "In order that I might gain the more." My objective is to win more people to Christ. He knows that Proverbs 11:30, "He that winneth souls is wise." He said in Romans 11 and verse 14 essentially the same thing in reference to Israel. He said, "I would do anything that by any means I would provoke to jealousy them who are my flesh and might save some of them." I'd do anything to reach Israel, in that case it was preaching to the Gentiles which became a point of jealousy and actually wound up with the Jews saying - Hey, what is this they're getting and we're not? And they were looking into it and getting saved. He says - I would do anything to provoke them.

In 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 8 he says - Remember Jesus Christ ... and then goes on ... for which I suffer trouble even unto bonds, but the word of God is not bound. But that's all right, I endure all things for the elect's sake that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus.

In other words, I would do anything if people would become saved. I will be a prisoner. I will go to jail. I will set my life aside. I will die. I will do anything. And short of those things I certainly will sacrifice some rights.

And here the Corinthians were just doing ... they were saying -Well, it's my right. And so they were going out and doing what they wanted to do and, of course, the weaker brother and the unbeliever was not able to rectify that thing and to resolve that with the faith they testified to and it became a stumbling block.

So, Paul says - This is the way I live. Now look at verse 20 and here he gets into some practical applications just showing you the areas in which he worked this way. "Unto the Jews I became as a Jew." Now he's talking about the race of Jews, under the Jews racially - I became as a Jew. In other words, I adapted their customs. Why, Paul? Here's the second purpose clause - "In order that I might gain the Jews."

Listen, when I was with the Jews, he says, whatever their ceremonial law dictated I did. I mean, if ... if it was important to them to have a certain meal a certain way - fine, I did it. If it was important for them to celebrate a certain day a certain way - fine, I did that too. If it was important for them to follow a certain pattern - I did that as well. Why? That I might win them.

What are you saying, Paul? Are you saying you win people to Christ by accommodating yourself? No. I'm saying you gain the right to speak the truth by accommodating yourself. If you go in and offend those people, you lose that.

Let me give you an illustration. Look at Acts 15, and this is...this is a very practical illustration. The Jerusalem Council was meeting, first church council here, was meeting to try to determine what they should do with the Gentile converts. In other words, they were still hung up on some Jewish tradition and so Gentiles were getting saved and they were saying - Well, you know, the Gentiles are getting saved and they're receiving the Holy Spirit an4 man, what are we going to do about this? And the Judaizers were saying - But they can't be real Christians they haven't been circumcised. And so the Jerusalem Council discusses the issue and they decide this, verse 19, this is James who is chairman speaking, and he kind of pulls together the discussion: "Wherefore then my judgment is this, that we trouble not them who from among the Gentiles are turned to God."

In other words, that's settled. We're not going to add any-thing. They've turned to God, we've seen it, that's beautiful, there's nothing to add - don't trouble them. We don't need to say - Oh, I'm sorry, you're not really saved because you didn't become Jewish first. As if Judaism was the only way to salvation. Forget it, let's accept them as they are. But, verse 20, this is good - "Let's write a letter to them and remind them of four things to stay away from."

Now you say - Wait a minute. Is this something necessary for salvation? Well, we'll see - watch. First of all, abstain from pollutions of idols. That means meat offered to idols. That's precisely the

Corinthian problem. Stay away from meat offered to idols. That was not only a hindering to Gentile converts but, listen, that was a hindering to Jewish people. The Jews despised pagan idolatry. The Jews despised the idolatry of...of all of the Gentile religions, and they were multiple. And so what he's simply saying here is - Number one, stay away from what offends not only the Gentile new believers, but even more so what offends the Jews because the Jews were offended by false gods ... stay away.

Second, stay away from fornication. You say - Well, that ... that's obvious. That's not a gray-area matter. Yeah, but I think the idea here is that fornication is a broad word. It means sexual sin. And connected with Gentile worship was sexual sin, a lot of it. And so he's saying - Have nothing to do with Gentile offerings and have nothing to do with hanging around Gentile worship, or Gentile activities where these things go on.

Thirdly, stay away from things strangled. The Gentiles would eat certain things that had been strangled, as a way of killing them. And that means that they had never been cut with an open wound. And that was wrong for a Jew because a Jew had to have the blood drained before he could eat anything. And if there wasn't an open wound, the blood wouldn't have been drained and so they would be eating something strangled - would have blood in it and that would be a violation of their traditional law, their ceremony.

Fourth, stay away from blood. The Gentiles in many of their ceremonies drank blood. I mean, just ... you know, drank it. Now why did they lay this on these Gentiles? Why did they say - Now it's all right, we accept you in the family, but would you do these four things? You Christians? Would you people please do these four things? Stay away from meat offered to idols, stay away from fornicating idolatrous activities, stay away from things strangled, and from blood ... why? Verse 21: "For Moses of old has in every city them that preach him." Who are they? Jews ... "Being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day."

You know why they should abstain from those things? Cause they would offend ... whom? ... the Jews. And if they ever started doing that the Jews wouldn't even begin to listen to what they had to say. So, here was a way that ... they don't have to ... there's nothing wrong with eating those kind of things, there's nothing wrong with eating strangled things, things that were a part of something offered to an idol, fornication does have moral implications, but these things were basically things that were very overtly offensive to the Jews... stay away, he says. Don't do anything that's going to eliminate the possibility of winning them.

Look at chapter 16, verse 1, here's another illustration. "They came to Derbe and Lystra," this is in the area of Galatia, "and behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain woman who was a Jewess and believed," a Christian Jewish lady, "but his father was a Gentile." Now that's a mixed marriage. Timothy is a child of a mixed marriage and by everybody in the Jewish world he would be considered a Gentile because his father was a Gentile and his mother would be considered a traitor because she had married a Gentile.

"But Timothy was well reported of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him." Now Paul really liked this young guy and he said - I want him with me. I want him to travel with me. So, "He took and circumcised him." Stop right there.

You say - Oh, no. Why did he do that? Did... did he believe you have to be circumcised to be saved? Nope. Why did he circum-cise him? Number one, Paul's ministry, in his strategy, was first of all in every town to go to whom? The Jews. He knew that his companion would have to have acceptability. Here is a guy from a mixed marriage and that mixed marriage is going to be very dis-tasteful and he is considered an uncircumcised son of a Gentile. So, Paul says - We need to circumcise him...not for salvation but to have entrance to evangelize the Jew so the Jew will at least accept him as a proselyte, as somebody who has adopted Judaism. Does it violate grace? No ... Timothy wasn't doing it to be saved and that is very clear here. There was a certain disciple, in verse 1, he was already a disciple of Christ. He was already a believer it was only to enable him to have entrance into

the Jewish community.
So you see, here Paul accommodates the Jews. Now this must have been a little bit painful for Timothy. I mean, is this really necessary, Paul? But it was necessary and here these guys were willing to go to that extreme because they realized that this was vital to open communication lines. So you can see that this is an illustration, go back to I Corinthians 9, this is an illustration of Paul adapting to the custom of Israel in order to gain a hearing among them and to win them to Christ. Now he says further in verse 20, "And to them that are under the law as under the law, not being myself under the law," which incidentally, that does appear in the better manuscripts even though it's in italics in the King James, "As under the law not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law." In other words, when I meet with people under the law, he's talking about Jews here and this addition to the statement of Jews earlier in the verse may refer to proselytes, we don't really know, or it may just be a further way to state what he's already stated in verse 20, once calling them Jews, once calling them those under the law, but he's simply saying - Even though I'm not under the ceremonial law, and that's what he's referring to. Even though I'm not under this thing, I will put myself under their ceremonies, I will do what they say in order to gain them, in order to win them. Now he doesn't mean that I'll compromise and follow their evil things, the evil that they do, or follow their hypocrisies...no, but I will keep those neutral gray area things, those ceremonial things that don't matter one way or the other if that will gain me entrance into their minds and hearts.
And he was really serious about this. In Romans 14 and verse 5, he says: "One man esteems a day above another, another esteems every day the same," well, fine, "He that regards the day regards it to the Lord and he regards not the day to the Lord he doesn't regard it, he that eats, eats to the Lord, gives God thanks. He that eateth not to the Lord, he eateth not and giveth God thanks." In other words, you've got some people who think dietary laws are in, some think they're out. Some think the Sabbath's in, some think they're out. Fine, don't make that a problem; go along with whoever you're with. That's a gray area thing. That's not a right or wrong issue and you can make a condescension there and gain a hearing. That was his style.
Then in verse 21, he moves from the Jews to the Gentiles. "To them that are without the law, I behave myself as one without law." Now somebody would misinterpret this and say - Oh ho, he's antinomian--he's really living it up. I spend my time as the Apostle of the Gentiles cause it's more fun. They don't have the law so I don't have it either. No ... no ...
SIDE TWO
He's not talking about the moral law. Look at the parenthesis, "Not being without law to God," I'm not saying that I am disregarding God's law, but I am under the law of Christ. And that, of course, is the law of love. He says - I'm not talking about moral things, I'm talking about ceremony. "To them that are without law, I am without law that I might gain them that are without law." Please don't misunderstand me, I don't mean that I disregard the moral law of God and I don't mean I reject the law of love given by our Lord Jesus Christ.
Do you know that when Paul was with the Gentiles he tended to fall into the Gentile pattern? He tended to do those things that would not offend the Gentiles. He ... I'm sure...avoided some Jewish things that he would normally do. For example, when he was in Jerusalem he would follow the Jewish custom. When he went to Antioch in Galatians chapter 2, he ate with the Gentiles and ate the way the Gentiles ate. Did you know that? And when Peter came up there and was eating with the Gentiles and having a great time and the Judaizers showed up and Peter went back to the Jews...Paul rebuked him to the face and said - You're compromising at this point. You're falling into the pattern of the Judaizers. That's interesting. Paul had fallen right into the Gentile patterns of Antioch and it didn't bother him at all. And he could keep it up but it still bothered Peter's conscience. He wasn't quite as liberated yet as Paul. And to clear the misunderstanding he simply says - I'm not talking about moral law to God and I'm not talking about the law of love regarding Christ.
So, Paul set aside some things. He didn't ea,t meat Offered to idols. You can believe that. He didn't

drink certain things that would offend, Romans chapter 14, when he was in Gentile territory. He wouldn't do that because he knew that would offend them.
Now the third group, verse 22: "To the weak became I as weak that I might gain the weak." Stop right there. Now who are the weak? Well, if you're consistent in your Pauline theology we have to take this to refer to overscrupulous Christians. Christians who are baby Christians, don't under-stand their liberty. For example, in the Jewish community there would be new Christians who would still want to keep the Sabbath, new Christians who still want to go to the temple, new Christians who still want to maintain some connection with the rabbis, new Christians who would still maintain certain customs and feasts in the home, new Christians who might cook the way the Jewish traditionally taught them to cook. In other words, they had never really understood their liberties. They were still too young, just emerging out of Judaism.
Among the Gentiles there would be those Gentiles saved out of idolatry who would just want nothing to do with meat offered to idols, nothing to do with pagan activities, nothing to do with festivals in their community that were any way related to gods.
And so you had this group of overscrupulous Christians who were somewhat legalistic. And he says - When I'm with them I become like them. I just adapt myself to them. If they've got hang-ups, boy, I just get right in and say - If that bothers you I won't do that, I'll just do whatever will open up my .... my life to you and gain entrance. He was very sensitive to people who were easily offended. His purpose? To gain the weak. The word gain is a most interesting word. It is a commercial term meaning to make a profit. I'm in this business to make a profit. And what he means is I want to win more souls to Christ, more dividends.
He sums it up at the end of verse 22 ... oh inciden ... let me give you an illustration of that before I pass, I just thought of it. To the weak became I as weak. Did you ever know Paul to adapt to a custom just to bring along a weak Christian? Look at Acts 21, glad I thought of this cause this is a good illustration. Acts 21. Now Paul is coming back to the Jewish community in Jerusalem and he's so anxious to see them cause he's brought a lot of money to help the poor saints, money garnered from the Gentile churches that he visited on his third journey. And he arrives in Jerusalem and he meets with James and the elders in verse 18. And they had a little exchange of greeting, glorified the Lord and verse 20, in the middle of the verse: "You see, brother," James is telling Paul, "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who believe?" Look ... look at Jerusalem, boy, we've got thousands of Jews that have been saved, wonderful. But, he says, they are all zealous of the law. They're still legalistic. They've been saved but they haven't emerged out of Judaism. They've ... they've received Jesus Christ but they haven't come out of that system yet. You know, I couldn't help but think that is not unlike the Roman Catholics that we see today. Many of them are coming to Christ. Not all of them are yet coming out of the Church. And you have a similar situation here. Here are some who are still zealous of the traditions and the ceremonies of the Jewish style of life.
"When they've been informed about you," James says, "that you teach the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses." Which, of course, was a lie, he never taught that at all. "And that you teach that they shouldn't circumcise their children, neither walk after the customs." Now that's a lie. But the word got around that Paul was anti-Jewish. And James was very concerned cause here's Paul in town and he says in verse 22: "What is going to happen?" is what it really means, - What's going to happen? The multitude is going to come together for they're going to hear you're here. And we're going to have a problem cause all this crowd's going to come and say - There's that guy who goes around preaching the gospel and then telling people not to circumcise their children and reject your Judaism, and don't keep the customs that have been all the heritage of our life, etc. etc.
We've got an idea, verse 23, James says. There are four men who have a vow, there's four guys, Jewish Christians, who are still hung up on the old Jewish patterns of ... of doing things and they ... they have a vow, this is a Nazarite vow. A Nazarite vow was a vow toward God, God, I'm going to set myself apart for you. It was done in response to a great blessing of God, or a great deliverance from

God. And apparently these guys had been blessed and they said - We're going to ... we're going to do this vow. Now you could have a Nazarite vow for any length of time, 7 days, 30 days, 60 days, 90 days. Three people in the Bible had Nazarite vows for life; Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist. But, this was a brief one. And these four guys were going to go and thank God in the Jewish way. What you do is this. You don't cut your hair, you don't drink wine, you know, the whole Nazarite vow, in Numbers chapter 6. So, they were going to make this vow, at the end of the time you shave your head and offer your hair as an offering. For some of you that offering would be rather minimal, but ... anyway, that's the idea. So, they were going to do this, these four guys. This was strictly Jewish, this was a Jewish way. And, you know, it isn't a bad way, it's all right if you were in Jewish custom and if your heart was right this was just a Jewish way of saying--Thanks. So we ... Paul even did it, didn't he? In Acts 18:18 he did it at Cenchrea, and shaved his head... he was still hung up on some of those things and that for him was a way of expressing thanks in a Jewish way. And so they were doing it. And it wasn't wrong, it's a gray area thing. It wasn't necessary but it was okay.
So, they said - Paul, why don't you join them? Take them, verse 24, purify thyself with them and pay all their expenses. Now this guy doesn't have a lot of money, you know. And there was payment to be made to do this to the temple ... and that they may shave their heads and all may know that those things of which they informed concerning you are nothing and that you do walk orderly and keep the law, the ceremonies. Now you do that and everybody will know you haven't abandoned your Judaism. Well, you know, there could have ... Paul could have responded like some of us, he could have said - Oh really, I don't have to do that. I like my hair the way it is. I don't want to get it long and then go around bald. Why should I do that? It isn't necessary. Who do they think they are? I'm the Apostle. What do you mean? I come into town, I've got all this money and they want me to go and make ... make this big deal just to conciliate them....listen, you bring them, I'll tell them what's going on. Why do I need to do that? I'm a free man. I don't...Ilm not bound by Jewish ceremony.
But you see, he was willing to condescend from his rights, set them aside to do whatever he needed to do to reach somebody. Fine. That's fine. So, you know what he did? Verse 26, he took the men and the next day purified himself with the men of the temple, signify the accomplishment of the days of purification till an offering should be offered for every one of them. They went through the whole process.
You say - Why did he do that? Here were some weak Christians, this was their way of thanking God, he didn't need to do that. I think by the time we get to Acts 21 he's pretty well aware of what his liberties are but he did it. He did it because they asked him to do it and because he knew it would help those weak brothers to see him in a different light. And if they could accept him as a person, if they could accept him as a Jew then they could hear what he had to say. Right? Listen, evangelism isn't all just evangelism; a lot of it is pre-evangelism, preparing to be heard.
Now go back to I Corinthians 9. So, you see he was to the Jew as a Jew, to the Gentile as a Gentile, to the weak brother as a weak brother. Why? The end of verse 22 sums it up. "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means...what? ... save some." What's he ... what's he want to do? Win them to Christ. I will be anything. You say - He's just compromising. No...no, now listen, the difference between condescension and limiting your liberty and compromise is the difference between what is optional and what is not optional. To condescend to meet somebody at their own level is to set aside a liberty that I have that is optional, to come down and meet that guy. To compromise is to set aside a truth that I have no business setting aside. The difference is in II Corinthians 2:17. Paul says there are some and we're not like them, who corrupt the Word of God, who make merchandise, one translation, literally who are hucksters of the Word of God.
You know what a huckster of the Word of God is? He sells a cheap gospel that's palatable to everybody by stripping it of its offensive character. He doesn't talk about the crucifixion and he doesn't talk about hell and he doesn't talk about anything that's going to offend so he sells a cheap gospel. As I said a few months ago, he sells glass for diamonds. And people will buy because they

don't know the difference. Paul says - No, no. Compromise is where you set aside the truth. Condescension is where you set aside a liberty that you could exercise to meet a man on his own level. Paul is not a men-pleaser, Galatians 1:10, he says - I'm no man-pleaser. I'm not going to set aside the truth for anybody. If a man is offended by the cross, that's his problem. If a man is offended by the truth of the Word of God, that's his problem. If a man is offended by church discipline, then that's his problem. But if a man is offended by some behavior that I am doing that isn't necessary then I'll stop doing that. That's my problem.

Verse 23, "And all things," literally the manuscripts say - and all things - rather than this, "And all things I do for ... what? ... the gospel's sake." What a man. What a life. That guy had one thought - How can I win people? I do everything for the gospel's sake. My whole life is set with that intention that I might be a partaker of it with you. Partaker ... sunkoinonos ... that I might be a co-sharer with you. I want you and me to be in the family together and so I'll do anything to see that happen...self-denial.

The second principle that he relates to here is self-control in verses 24 to 27. And it's very simple and we'll go through it just briefly, notice it. Self-control, verse 24 ... now he's going to show them how important it is. If you're going to really limit your liberty, it's going to be a discipline, you're going to have to say no to some things that your ole body wants to do. You're going to have to cut out some things, you're going to have to narrow that deal down and live a life that's going to be circumscribed by the wishes of other people. And that isn't easy. Self-denial comes first. I'm not the most important, they are. Number two, I'm going to have to discipline me. Watch verse 24, and he uses an athletic metaphor: "Do you know not ... don't you know, really, that they who run in a race all run but one receives a prize." Now that's simple, stop right there.

Do you know that? he says to the Corinthians. They knew it. They knew all about athletics. Ever since the day of Alexander the Great, athletics dominated Greek society. Two most famous athletic competitions were the Olympic Games and the Isthmian games held in Corinth every third year. They had the Isthmian games right there, they knew everything about it. Don't you know that everybody runs but only one wins? Sure they knew that. And, man, they knew what it was to win. Contestants...in order to get into the finals there at the Isthmian games had to give proof of ten months of training and the last 30 days before the event they all came into the community and they had to go to the gymnasium every single day, attending exercises and so forth. And only when all of those conditions were fulfilled were they able to run. And when they ran and won, the one who ran to win and gained the wreath, and in Corinth they gave a pine wreath, in other cities it was different, but there it was a pine wreath. The one who won was immortalized. The highest honor that human beings could give a man were given to the one who was first in those games. Tie was immortalized. And we've been well aware of this in watching the Olympics recently, that this is practically what our society does with people who win first place...immortalize them.

So, they ran to win. And there was only one winner. And so he says at the end of verse 24 - So you run that you may win. Listen, if you're in this race to win souls then you're going to have run to win it. In the Greek contest there can only be one winner. In the Christian life the prize is open to everybody. Everybody runs his own race. And you can run to win. The Corinthians were so busy grasping at their rights they were losing the prize. Instead of gaining the prize which was to win souls they were grasping their rights along the way and losing the prize of being able to win souls. They were cutting off their testimony and as well they were cutting off their ability to bring along weaker brothers to a position of strength.

Now notice, people, the prize is not salvation, it is winning men to Christ. I want to win men to Christ so I will run as hard and as diligently and as rapidly as it will take me to win that prize.

Verse 25, he goes a step further. "Everybody that strives for the mastery is temperate in all things." And everybody who runs to win is temperate. You know what that word means? Self-controlled ... self-controlled. You can't break training rules. Any of you who participated in athletics, you know how

this works. But it's true in everything. There are only two kinds of people in the world, the people who have self-discipline and the people who don't. And the people who have self-discipline are running the world. You never succeed in anything unless you're disciplined. You never succeed academically, you never succeed spiritually, you never succeed in your marriage, you'll never succeed anywhere, anytime unless you're disciplined to that goal.
And so, he's saying - Look, everybody that runs to win has self-control in everything. Man, when I look back on the days when I participated in athletics and...and as I deal with athletes around me, I know this and you know this that you can't succeed at anything unless you pay a high price. What you eat is circum-scribed, your sleep, your exercise, it's continual. This becomes your life and you hear them on the television talking about some of these Olympic athletes in the Winter Olympics who have spent year after year after year after year to get that thing hung around their neck. It's incredible. It's worth $110. In those days it was a pine wreath that was gone in a week. Didn't have any newspapers, I wonder how the word got around.
But if you're going to win you're going to have to have self-control. No broken training rules ... discipline. And you know, -athletes in my mind are the most disciplined people in the world because there's such an ego factor in it. And you ... people will discipline themselves for their ego's sake, for self-sake. It's incredible how they will but they will. I know, I went through that. When I think about the things I did in order to run around with that piece of pig under my arm, it's incredible ... how ridiculous.

Now notice what further, he says: "They do it to obtain a pine wreath, a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." Fantastic ... we have an inheritance, Peter says, incorruptible, undefiled, fadeth not away. Right? First Peter 1:4...I mean, we're ... we're trying to win an incorruptible crown, a crown that the Lord is going to give us and the way we win it is by winning souls and the way we win souls is by self-control, by setting a goal and going at that goal. Now this is amazing. Listen, he says, if a man can submit to such discipline to win a pine wreath what should a Christian do to win a crown that fades not away?
When I graduated from college I went into the gymnasium where they had the record board and I looked up there, you know, and I had my name on a lot of the school records in various sports. And I looked at them, you know, it was a big deal and I remember a year later I came back and ... for some alumni deal or something, and I looked at the board and I noticed that a whole lot of my records had been broken. And that was kind of heart-rending experience. And I came back the next year and somebody had misplaced the record board and no one knew where it was. And a few years later the school went out of existence. Big deal. I remember when the earthquake happened in 1971 and my wife ran in and said - The ultimate tragedy has occurred. And I said - What? She said - Your football trophy fell over and broke...ha-ha. She loved it. You know, when you think of what you go through to gain that, he says - You know, it's amazing the strenuous self-control of the athlete for a fleeting reward is a rebuke to a half-hearted flabby Christian. I mean, why can't we discipline and control ourselves to the ends that are meaningful?
Paul says - If I can watch a guy discipline himself to win a pine wreath, you watch me discipline myself to win somebody to Christ. I'll cut out anything in my life that stands in his way. You know, it isn't ... an athlete has a right to eat a chocolate sundae before he runs 100-yard dash, that's his privilege ... not smart. And if he doesn't sacrifice that right he's in trouble. It isn't wrong it's just not smart. It just cuts him down and he can't win. So, athletes deny themselves many lawful pleasures, many rights ... so must the Christian.
Verse 26, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly," stop right there. Listen, I know where the goal is. I know what the boundaries of the track are. And I know how to get to the goal. You know, if you don't know the goal is, and you don't know where the boundaries of the track are, you're going to be roaming all over everywhere. You're not going to even be able to run the thing. A man with no goal

and no bounds to the track runs with no effort. I know my goal, I know the boundaries of my track, I know what I want to do--I want to win people to Jesus, and it takes self-control and that's the way I'm going to go. And I'll set aside anything that stands in the way ... anything. Now that's the positive ... that's the mental effort. That's Paul saying in his mind - I'm going there and that's where I'm going and I'll pay any price. That's the positive.

But there's a negative cause something's in his way. Look at verse 26, he introduces it: "So fight I, not as one that beats the air." Now you say - What are you doing? What is this? Now he's mixing his metaphors. I thought you were in a race, what's the boxing match have to do with it? Well, while I'm running I got this opponent that I have to keep knocking out because he wants me to get off the track. And so, he says, I don't shadow box, you know, not just sparring, I bang right on the nose. I know where the opponent is and I flatten him. You say - Who is this opponent? Verse 27: "My body, my flesh, I've got to bring it into subjection." So, he says, "I keep under my body," that's really not a good translation, the words literally in the Greek - I give my body a black eye - literally, I knock them out. I put his lights out. I say to the flesh, - Humh - take that. See. That's what he's saying.

You know what the problem is negatively? Positively my mental toughness - I'm going. Negatively - what I have to do is - boom -have to pound on that body to keep the body under control. Now those are the two things that make a good athlete. Thinking of track and competition, two things make a great track athlete, one is subdued body. In other words, have you ever seen an athlete and looked at his body, his body, if he's a supreme athlete, if he's a world-class athlete, or...or really any good athlete, his body is in control. He doesn't come out 13 pounds overweight - blup-blup down the track. You know, it doesn't happen. Or you don't see his legs withered and shriveled up, it just doesn't happen. Or you don't see him looking emaciated and pale and peaked and his face all sunken and gray. He doesn't look like that. He is healthy. Why? Because he subdues his body, he nourishes his body. He controls his body. He says -I will control you, body, to do what I want you to do. @,lost people in our world are controlled by their bodies. Their bodies tell their minds what to do. Feed me more. Put me to sleep. You know, this kind of thing. Don't overdo me. I've run far enough. Set me down. You know, this kind of stuff. We...we do not ... we do not Control the body but the body controls us. That's why Paul says - Mortify the flesh. But an athlete has two things going for him. One is he knows how to subdue the body, and secondly, he has the mental toughness to know what his goal is. Two things make a great athlete, a subdued body and a mental desire to put out the effort. Paul says - Positively my mind is set, I know where the bounds of the track are, I know where the goal is, I know exactly where I'm going. Negatively, I subject my body to get me to the place I want to go to. Worldly lusts, passion, the flesh, whatever the spiritual battle might be that would rob you of the crown, Paul says - Get that body into submission, make it your slave.

Why, Paul? Why do you do this? Verse 27: "Lest that by any means when I have heralded to others, I myself should be disqualified." Now this is a metaphor right out of the Isthmian games. When the Isthmian games began a herald came out, trumpet was blown to call the attention of everybody and the herald stood up and what he did was announce the contest, announce the event, announce the names of all the contestants and announce the rules. And then the contestants entered it. Anybody who violated any of those rules was disqualified. And Paul says - The one thing I would never want to happen to me would be for me to be the guy who gives everybody else the rules and then gets in the race and breaks them and is disqualified. I'm the guy who has to herald this. I'm the guy who's telling everybody else. I'm the Apostle who spreads the word. What would happen if I became disqualified? And I could be disqualified if I didn't subdue the body. Boy, there are a lot of people in Christian service who started out to serve the Lord but their flesh got away with them and they've been disqualified. They've been set on a bench. Paul says -I don't want it to happen to me so I have that mental toughness to say there's my goal, I'm going and I have that desire to subdue the body. Listen, the reckless, flabby Corinthians thought they could indulge their liberties to the hilt while the devoted Apostle was engaged in a life of self-denial and self-control to gain entrance for the gospel

into the hearts of men. And he sets for us the model of how we ought to live. Evangelism doesn't just come by accident, it comes to those who are ready to be used of God.
Father, thank You for our insights that the Holy Spirit has made ours as we've shared together this morning. Give us that kind of desire, give us that strength, give us that commitment that it takes to really be used of you. Help us to take Paul as a model, help us to make every sacrifice necessary to win someone to You, to gain entrance into some heart. We'll thank You for what You can do through us when we come to that point as Your Spirit leads us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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