

**FOR THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL****1 Corinthians 9****(Read 1 Corinthians 9)**

**INTRO:** My dad would have turned 100 years old last Friday. He was a great servant of God his entire life, even though he only had an eighth grade education. He never had a single class in biblical Greek, or a class on how to design a sermon. But one day, just as World War 2 was really kicking into gear he went to church as Irvin Tyson, dairy worker, and came home that day, Irvin Tyson, dairy worker, and Brethren in Christ minister. He never sensed a calling – but that wasn't terribly unusual since in those one's calling to the ministry came from the body. In other words, if your brothers and sisters in your church felt that you had the gifts to be a minister. That was the calling. He followed that calling for 25 years. My home congregation had two ministers and he was one of them. When the senior pastor retired in 1967, Daddy did too. He saw the opportunity for Graterford Brethren in Christ Church to move a bit more into the modern age. So we hired our first paid pastor and changed the name of the congregation to Perkiomen Valley Brethren in Christ since the huge state penitentiary up on the hill on the other side of the Perkiomen Creek (and actually built on my great grandfather's farm which had been taken from him) which was giving the name Graterford a bad connotation. Daddy and his senior pastor, Jacob Bowers, never received a penny for being a pastor. It was called the free ministry and he was ready and willing to have it that way. But he was more than ready to leave the ministry at that time since he didn't sense the calling that I did to ministry. He was an ordained minister for the rest of his life, and he served the church faithfully, but he never felt the calling to pastoral ministry.

I on the other hand, believe that my calling began when I was little bigger than Fiona. For quite a number of years I thought that it was just hero worship. My two favorite pastors, my dad and Uncle Jake, as we called him, were the kind of people that I wanted to emulate. But by the time I was 21, I knew that I was running from my calling and that I needed to turn and go in the direction God was calling me.

My mother didn't want me to be a pastor. She didn't think my skin was thick enough to be a pastor. Really, it isn't, it's just that I've always had the best congregations in the world, and they haven't tested the thickness of my skin. They've loved on me as I've loved on them.

And yet some people are amazed that I'm in ministry. My boss at Navajo mission was Marion Heisey. A few of you might know him since he was from our Valley Chapel Congregation over in Canton. Marion was a great boss. But apparently he never saw me fitting in as a pastor. So when I see him from time to time, he will without fail put his arm around my shoulder and just shake his head in amazement and wonder out loud how I ever became a pastor. It makes me wonder what I was really like at the mission.

But God called me. I was free to do anything. There was a time when I wanted to be an anthropologist, and I was even enrolled at the University of New Mexico to study it as I allegedly to prepare for missions. But that's not what God's calling was. He turned me around and I've never looked back in the ensuing 40-plus years.

It's not good to deny a calling. It's worse to discourage someone from a calling on their life. My mother may have desired something for me other than pastoral ministry, and she did, but she never told me or tried to lead me in any direction other than where God was leading. It's heartbreaking when it does happen though. My friends, LeRoy and Arlene were an integral part of our previous church. When they were newlyweds in the early 1950s, they both sensed a strong call to Brethren in Christ missions. But when they sought to heed the call, a respected leader in the church talked them out of it. They never told me who the leader was, or what his reasons were, but 50 years later they both felt they had turned their back on God, or at least his calling. They had a thriving dairy farm and then when they got out of dairy, they were even more successful at raising broiler chickens. They were leaders in our church, and they were a huge blessing to us at Conoy. But they always wondered. Something had been missing. Numerous times they shared wistfully on what might have been. So when they retired, perhaps a little over 10 years ago, they sold that farm and went into missions. They bought a motor home and drove from site to site serving with Mennonite Disaster Service and at Native American mission locations and different Christian work sites that served the underserved. They had finally heeded the calling and they were in their glory.

My friend Ilam pastors his little flock in Webuye in Western Kenya. He gets little or no compensation for being a pastor. He deserves to be paid handsomely for the work that he does. He feeds the hungry, he and his wife give orphans, who have lost their parents to the scourge of AIDS, a home. Back in 2012 when he invited

me to come and speak at a Bible conference, he informed me that all my expenses when I was in country would be covered. I took him in his word. I thought that he was working with a group of people. But when I got there my eyes were opened. I realized there was a group, but they were more than happy to have Ilam pay for it all – and Ilam had little or no money. The fact was Kathy and I paid for much of the Bible conference. We worshiped in a big army tent that Ilam had rented for 2000 Kenya shillings (\$18.27) from a soldier. I wonder if the soldier ever informed his superiors of what he was doing with the tent. Or that he was making money from it. There were other expenses, and Ilam sold the only cow that he had to pay for the expenses. Because that was his calling and he was not going to ignore it.

Here in Chapter 9 Paul is explaining to the Corinthians that he has every right as an apostle. He's right up there with Peter and James and other apostles who had walked with Jesus. Paul had the same rights, and he had the same rights to compensation. But he chose not to take that compensation. In fact he chose to work for himself. Paul was a tentmaker, he worked with his hands and made a living so that he could pay for his ministry.

The Corinthians, being Greeks, felt that work was below a person's stature. Work of any kind, whether it was manual labor or not was for the lower classes only. Other people are to work, therefore if Paul was as high and mighty as he said he was as an apostle, he should not be using up valuable time working. Paul said otherwise. Of course, he would be free to take compensation from patrons who would support his ministry, he could even receive tithes that were raised by the people of Corinth. But this church was poor. We've established that before – the first converts to the Way of Christ were the hardscrabble poor and the slave class and they didn't have money. So Paul worked with them in order to identify with them, and to show that he wasn't afraid to work. His spirited justification of his actions in better than two-thirds of chapter 9 give the impression that he feels he has to defend himself. But really he didn't care that some thought that he shouldn't be lowering himself to common labor because he was doing it for the Kingdom and for the purpose of the gospel. One needs no higher calling.

You see, Paul became *all things to all people so that some might be saved*. He was willing to go to great lengths to do it. He was free, yes, but he gave it all up to be a slave of the Gospel. He became like a Jew, to win the Jews. He became like a Gentile to win those who are Gentile. To the weak he became weak, to win the weak. Verse 22 tells us he *became all things to all people so that by all possible means h might save some*. Is this duplicitous? Is it becoming a chameleon? No! It is what is required for the sake of the gospel. It's worth it!

Paul illustrates his point as he finishes his thought with something almost all Corinthians we be familiar with – the Games. You've heard of the Olympic Games. This huge worldwide athletic competition began in Athens, Greece in 1896. The original games were held in Olympia, in Greece beginning in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The Ithsmian Games were held in Corinth and were a big deal too. People would have pictured a disciplined runner or muscled boxer as Paul conjured an image for them. Paul points out that these men reached the peak of conditioning to not by sleeping in each day and stuffing their faces with chips and chocolate. Instead each goes into strict training with the proper food, rest, and exercise. From what my research tells me, these competitors trained for up to ten months to be ready for the Games. And what was the prize? LEAVES! Yes, the winner received a wreath of laurel leaves and it was placed on their head.

They trained for 10 months!

They abstained from pleasure and family!

All to win the games – FOR LEAVES!!!!

But Paul points out his mission has far more at stake. Souls are on the line. He does it all for the Gospel that he might save some. He puts his all into the effort for the sake of the Gospel – not LEAVES!

You've probably been thinking how this has been an unusual sermon. That is partially true because Chapter 9 is not set up to be easy for a preacher to preach. Not this preacher anyway, I'm not Alistair Begg who could preach from the phone book and make it spiritually and eternally relevant.

But we can see Paul's heart here. He is in it to win it. He's not going to be delayed by the sniping and the negativity that he hears from people who are trying to undermine his ministry. He is going to go full speed ahead with the ministry of the gospel. His reputation is not what is on the line, but souls of people who need Jesus.

My question is, as I finish this out, how are we any different from Paul? We can use the excuse that we're not an Apostle like him who had special revelation from God. To a certain extent that's true. But we have the same

commission and we have the same Holy Spirit, and most of all, we have the same gospel to share. So, what are we doing for the purpose of the gospel?

We serve the same Lord. We have received the same calling. We have been called to be all things to all people as well. Our job is to be a witness. Whether you're driving a combine, scooping manure, manufacturing boxes, binding books, receiving people on a doctor's office, teaching children, no matter what you do, your job is a witness. You are there for a purpose. If you have made a profession of faith, you have been called to share Jesus. Time is getting short. People need Jesus. Share him. Do it all for the purpose of the gospel. Amen