



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Text 1 Corinthians 9:15-23

1 Corinthians

“Winning Souls”

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Mark, and good morning. We are in 1 Corinthians. And if you are a visitor, if you’ve never been to Believers Chapel, we go through books of the Bible consecutively chapter by chapter, and we’re doing that with 1 Corinthians this morning. We’ve been in it for some time. We’re in chapter 9 now, and we’re going to look at verses 15 through 23. We’re in the midst of a subject that Paul has taken up on Christian liberty, on how to use it and not abuse it. And he has indicated to the strong, those with understanding, that they should be willing to forgo some of their liberties for the sake of those who don’t have a firm understanding on Christian liberty. And he’s done that himself. And one example of how he does that was not taking support from the churches. He ministered the gospel free of charge. And so explained some of that, and that’s where we take up in verse 15.

“But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

“For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might

win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.” May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it. Let’s pray.

Father, we do thank You for this time together. We praise you for a beautiful morning. The weather is fine. It’s nice, and yet what really makes this a beautiful day is the fellowship that we have with one another. We are with the saints. We are fellowshiping together. And that is a wonderful thing to do. It’s wonderful simply to meet with friends that we haven’t seen through the week, but what’s particularly important and what is essential in making this fellowship Christian fellowship is we do it around Your Word. We join together in studying Your Word. And so, Father, as we do that, bless us. May the Spirit of God teach us. Guide us in the truth. Guide us in the things that we’ve read that we might understand them and know how they apply to our lives, that we would have a conviction, a kind of conviction that Paul had, of the need of living in love toward one another.

That’s really the essence of what he’s giving instruction to do. Love the brethren, love the weak, and be willing to make sacrifices for them to do what is necessary and what is best for others and, as he tells us here, for the promotion of the gospel. So make that a concern of ours, Father. Help us to become less concerned about ourselves and more concerned about others, and certainly most of all concerned about You, Your glory and promoting Your Word, and the gospel, and the lost world. So Father, we pray that you’d bless us with an understanding, build us up in the faith, encourage us, encourage us.

Bless us materially, as well, Father. We have a long list of requests of those who are facing great trials, physical problems. Some have lost their health. Some are going through procedures that are serious, facing some of those this week, and we pray for them. Pray for those who are recovering from surgery, that You would heal them and encourage them in the midst of that, and remind all of us, Father, that we’re dependent upon you for everything. We can enjoy good health one moment and lose it the next. It’s a great gift that You give us and we should be appreciative of it. So often we lose sight of these things

and that blessings that we have when we’re enjoying them. We take it for granted. And so we confess that, Father. That’s wrong.

We give you thanks for all the good things You give us. You give us good health. You give us the opportunity that we have now to study together and to fellowship and worship together. And you give us the great blessing of doing that in a free nation. And so we pray for our land. We pray You’d bless it. We pray for our leaders. We pray that You give them wisdom and give them protection. Bless them. And bless us now. May we enjoy this freedom that we have in the land in which you’ve blessed us, and may we by the Spirit’s power focus our attention on the things that we’ll study and be built up in the faith. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

Charles Spurgeon wrote a little book entitled *The Soul Winner*. Took the title from Proverbs 11:30, where Solomon tells us that he who wins souls is wise. Spurgeon remarked that the text doesn’t say “he that winneth sovereigns is wise, that it is he who earns money is wise.” That takes some wisdom, of course. Not just anyone can earn money and do a good job of it. But as Spurgeon says, “Such wisdom is of the earth and ends with the earth.” The wisdom God praises produces lasting results and is of infinite benefit to others. It is soul winning. It is in the person who, as Spurgeon says, “turns men from the error of their ways to God and so is made the means of saving them from going down to hell.” What a terrible thought that is. What a terrible reality it is. Going down to hell. But that’s how serious this matter of soul winning is.

Paul understood that. He was a soul winner. In fact, you’ll never understand the apostle Paul until you understand that he was chiefly a soul winner. His whole life was devoted to that. But a lot of people in Paul’s day in the church didn’t understand that. So for them, Paul was a puzzle. They didn’t understand his behavior. He could eat a hot dog one day and be a vegan the next. He could walk with philosophers in the marketplace of Athens and worship with Jews in the temple of Jerusalem. He could circumcise Timothy but stubbornly refuse to circumcise Titus. He could do seemingly contradictory things. He became, as he said, “all things to all men.” He adapted easily to circumstances which many people thought was an inconsistency in his behavior. Even today when we say some person or preacher is “all things to all men” we generally use that expression more in blame

than in praise. But Paul was completely consistent. There was a method to his madness, as they say, only there was no madness to Paul. It was all wisdom and love. And he explains this in 1 Corinthians 9.

Paul has been settling a dispute about Christian liberty. He has explained that liberty is ruled by love, which means we must never let our liberty hinder the spiritual welfare of others. In particular, the issue had to do with diet, with eating meat that had been dedicated to pagan gods. It was a very common practice in the ancient world. In fact, as we have covered in our previous studies, people would dine at the temple. There were restaurants there and they would eat meat that had been dedicated to the god of that temple. Or if they went to the marketplace to buy meat, the best cuts of meat generally were those that had been dedicated to a false god. Well, some people in the church had scruples about that. They were very uncomfortable about that for various reasons. It offended some. The thought of it, and others, no doubt, it brought back memories of their pagan pasts that they wanted to forget.

For a variety of reasons, people in the church who were weak in their knowledge of their Christian liberty, who didn’t have a full understanding of it had reservations about such practices. So if they did them, they’d violate their conscience and that was a sin. So sometimes the mature needed to restrict their rights for the good of others. Better that they do that than that they practice their liberty as they had a right to do and as was legitimate, but then in so doing influence someone to violate their conscience, and therefore sin. Well, this is Paul’s counsel to the strong. This is his counsel to those who have a deeper, more profound understanding of their Christian liberty, and that is waive your rights on occasion. Be wise about things.

Well, Paul did that. Paul was a man who understood his freedom. He knew his rights. He knew that there were no restrictions on his diet, that he could eat every kind of food. But he said at the end of chapter 8 that if food causes his brother to stumble, he will never eat meat again. Now that’s a hypothetical. That occasion hadn’t arisen. It probably wouldn’t arise. But he states it to make a point and show the importance of this principle. Now Paul did eliminate certain things from his life, things he had a right to do. He did practice what he preached, and in chapter 9 he gives an illustration from his own life of what he actually did give up for others, and

that was financial support from the churches. He stated that, and now in verses 15 through 23, he explains why he did that.

Paul had a strategy. He had a reason for his policy of self-denial. It was to win the lost and strengthen the weak. He begins in verse 15 by repeating his refusal to use his right to receive support and quickly reassures the Corinthians that he was not writing that, he was not telling them about his right to receive financial support, which he was denying himself, in order to get them to support him. Now Paul must have been familiar with people who did that very thing, who said they were not appealing for funds, but were really having a hidden motive, a hidden agenda, a hidden purpose in all of that, and were actually seeking funds. So Paul makes a point. No. He’s not doing that. He didn’t ask for money. That was his policy. He calls it his boast and explains that it was so important to him to follow this principle that he would rather die than have anyone violate it or lead him into violating it or, as he puts it, make his boast empty.

And then in the next verse as he gives the reasons, this practice was so important to him. One reason was that he gained a reward through it. As he’ll explain, that is the reward, the very practice of it. He didn’t get his reward from preaching. That’s surprising to us. We would think that’s exactly where Paul’s reward came from, preaching as he did. But as he explains, we can only boast about doing something beyond what is expected of us, beyond what is required of us to do. We get a reward for doing something voluntarily that is not expected of us, going beyond the call of duty, so to speak.

Preaching the gospel was not voluntary for him. It was not an option. He had no choice but to preach. That’s what he says in verse 16. “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” Now there’s a sense in which all of us can say that. Woe is me if I ignore the gospel, if I don’t live a life that reflects the grace of God, if I don’t proclaim Christ when I have the opportunities to do it. Woe is me if I shrink from that great privilege, but that solemn responsibility. So there’s a sense in which his statement is true of all of us, but there is a special sense in which Paul is speaking that was unique to him. When he was saved on the Damascus road, he was put in service for Christ. In fact, in Philippians 3:12, he says he “was laid hold of by

Christ.” That has the idea of being arrested by Christ. That’s the thought. In fact, the word “laid hold of” has the idea of being taken by surprise, of a force taking you.

It’s the most famous conversion in history and it completely refutes the notion of free will and salvation. Paul was on his way to arrest Christians when he was arrested. Paul didn’t seek or ask for his salvation or his commission in the ministry. He wasn’t desiring to be the apostle to the Gentiles. He wasn’t seeking Christ. He was doing just the opposite. He was seeking to snuff out the very name of Jesus Christ. He was on his way to Damascus to arrest, imprison, and even kill Christians. But Christ seized him in the middle of that, captured him, made him His child, and appointed him an apostle with a great mission to the Gentiles. He didn’t give Paul a choice in the matter. In fact, in Galatians 1:15-16, Paul says that this was planned from before his birth, meaning from all eternity. This was God’s destiny for him.

Now Paul, of course, willingly surrendered. He believed in Christ as his Lord and Savior and he rejoiced in that. He rejoiced in the precious blood of Christ that pleads before him, pleads for him before the throne. He’s justified and he rejoiced in that and he proclaimed it with great joy. But all of that, the understanding of it, the blessing of it, it all came as a complete surprise and at God’s initiative, 100 percent his initiative, all according to God’s plan. The result was Christ owned him. He was Christ’s slave. That’s what he calls himself. And he had no choice but to obey his master, obey the Lord, and preach the gospel from one end of the Roman empire to the other.

If he didn’t preach, he foresaw some difficulty coming, some woe, he says. But if he did preach, he was only doing what he was supposed to do, only doing what he had been commissioned to do. And he explains that in verse 17, saying that if he ministered voluntarily, meaning if his preaching were an option for him, something that he could say he chose to do or chose not to do, that this was a choice given to him, and he chose to do it, then he could say he has a reward for that. But if it wasn’t an option, if he says, it was “against my will,” meaning not that he was unwilling, but if he had no choice in this matter, then he says, “I have a stewardship entrusted to me.” And that was the case.

When Paul was converted, he was conscripted into Christ’s service. He was put in it. A stewardship was given to him, which was the kind of task that was given to a slave. He had no choice but to serve. Now, of course, as I said, he served

willingly. He served gladly. It was his great joy and privilege to be called into that great service. He marveled over that. But still, he had no choice but to preach. He was obliged to minister. What Paul was not obliged to do was pay his own way in the ministry. He had the right as an apostle to receive support from the churches, as all the other apostles did and the brothers of Christ. They were supported by the churches. They weren’t expected to fund themselves.

But he refused that. He financed himself in the ministry. He says in verse 18 he “offered the gospel without charge.” And that was his reward or that was his boast, as he called it. His pay was to serve without pay. So again, he didn’t mention this, he didn’t mention his right as an apostle to financial support so that they would then support him. It was his to do voluntarily, waive his right and support himself. And he could make the gospel heard freely without cost to anyone. He did that. He considered that his privilege. It blessed the churches in doing that. It took an obligation, a burden off others. It honored Christ.

And in doing that, really, he gave a picture, a testimony of the very nature of the gospel. It is free. Grace is free. And he illustrated that in his life and ministry. He is free. That’s what he says in verse 19. But this man who is completely free, without obligations to people, free in his standing with Christ, a man who enjoyed his Christian liberty, free, he says, but this free man made himself a slave to others. He voluntarily dedicated his life to service for the benefit of other people. And that service was in preaching the gospel, the good news of salvation, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Christ. There’s no greater blessing than that. So all that Paul did, all the decisions he made and actions he took were in the interest of promoting that, removing any hindrance of the gospel. No one could say Paul was doing it for the money. Doing whatever he could to open up the gospel to other people, denying himself whatever might be an offense to someone else. In fact, he was so dedicated to the gospel that he willingly waived his rights as a Christian to become everyone’s slave in the hope of winning souls for Christ.

He explains all of that in the next verses. He explains his policy of flexibility in the ministry. He says in verse 20 that he lived like a Jew when it was necessary. “To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law.” Well, Paul, of course, was a Jew by birth. In

Philippians 3:5, he calls himself “a Hebrew of the Hebrews.” Not everyone could make that claim. There were lots of Jews that couldn’t trace their lineage back all that far, I suppose. Paul could. He knew he was of the tribe of Benjamin. He knew his pedigree. But when he was born again, he was released from the law and a Jewish way of life. “Christ is the end of the law,” he wrote in Romans 10:4. The law of Moses has been fulfilled in Christ and we who have believed in Him, we who have trusted in Christ and are in Christ, are no longer under the law, no longer under the law of Moses. That’s over. That’s finished. That’s Paul’s teaching in Galatians 3 and then chapter 4, as well.

Now Paul understood that. He understood his freedom. He used his freedom, but he was also willing to restrict his freedom and conform to Jewish customs when confronting Jews in order to have an opportunity with them, in order not to shut a door or raise a wall that would hinder his witness with them. That explains his behavior in Acts 16, when he takes Timothy along with him on the second missionary journey. Timothy’s mother was a Jewess. His father was a pagan, an unbeliever. Timothy was a believer, but he had not been circumcised. So Luke writes Paul “circumcised him because of the Jews.” Contrast that with the way he handled Titus in Galatians 2. And there seems to be on the face of it an inconsistency because when he and Barnabas took Titus to Jerusalem to the great council that was there where a major issue on the gospel was being debated, they didn’t circumcise Titus.

That seems inconsistent, but in fact Paul was being completely consistent. The difference in his actions is explained by the difference in circumstances. In the case of Titus, there was a powerful party in Jerusalem that taught the need of circumcision for salvation. They were saying faith alone is not enough. Certainly, we must believe in Jesus Christ. He’s the Son of God. He’s the Messiah. He’s the Savior. But all who believe must also be circumcised. They added that one work to the gospel. It’s much like today, where people say, “Sure, you must believe in Jesus Christ. We believe that He is the Son of God. But it’s not enough to believe. One must also be baptized. Until then, there’s no salvation.” So this is the debate that Paul entered, and he brought Titus with him to demonstrate that no, that’s false. The gospel is the promise of salvation through faith alone. It is all of grace. It’s all a free



gift. And Titus was sort of a test case. Titus was a Gentile who was saved apart from circumcision. And Paul used him to demonstrate that fact.

The situation with Timothy was different. That had to do with missionary strategy, not the terms of salvation. Timothy could not have entered the synagogues uncircumcised, and as you read through the book of Acts, you know that when Paul carried the gospel from city to city, the first place he went was to the synagogue. The synagogue had an open forum. It gave Paul the opportunity to stand before the audience and preach the gospel and explain that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law, is the fulfillment of the prophets. His death was prophesied. He was the sacrificial Lamb of God, and present the gospel to them. But if Timothy was uncircumcised, that would be prevented. So Paul circumcised him so that he wouldn’t hinder the preaching of the gospel. But he refused to circumcise Titus because that would have compromised the truth of the gospel.

Paul was completely consistent. When the purity of the gospel was at risk, he would not circumcise. When the progress of the gospel was at risk, he would circumcise. He does everything for the sake of the gospel. He did everything to win souls. When that required living like a Jew, he lived like a Jew, and he lived like a Gentile for the sake of winning the Gentiles. That’s what he says in verse 21. Those “who are without law, as without law.” He means by that that they, the Gentiles, were without the Mosaic law. All men have law. They have a conscience. It’s part of being born in the image of God. We have a sense of ought. We have a sense of right and wrong. We have a conscience and a natural sense of what we should do.

And men naturally develop that into a kind of legal code. Greek and Roman societies had rules. They had laws. They prohibited murder. They prohibited theft, just like the Jews did. But they didn’t have the dietary laws or the sabbatarian laws. They didn’t have the ceremonial laws that the Jews had. Gentiles lived outside of that. They didn’t have the law in that sense. And when Paul was with them, when he was with the Gentiles, he lived as they lived. He lived as without law, meaning he lived without the law of Moses. He didn’t try to conform to the law of Moses while living with the Gentiles. He didn’t insist on kosher food, for example, when he sat down to eat with a Greek.

But he didn’t live lawlessly and he certainly didn’t mean to suggest that. And so to avoid any confusion, he says while living without law he was “under the law of

Christ.” He lived an honest, ethical life. He observed the law of Christ as every Christian must. The fact that we are not under the law of Moses does not mean that we have no moral guidelines. In Galatians 6:1-2, Paul talks about the law of Christ. And the law of Christ there in that context is bearing one another’s burdens. It’s helping the weak. It’s restoring a fallen brethren, those who go astray. It’s encouraging them. It’s correcting them. The law of Christ is the principle of love. That’s really what he says in the previous chapter. In Galatians 5:14, he says love fulfills the whole law. Love never contradicts righteousness. Love always seeks a person’s good. And that fits well here with Paul’s concern for the weaker brother. The believer with scruples, with reservations about eating meat offered to idols. Love should guide us to seek that person’s welfare and make sacrifices for that person’s welfare.

Now here the expression that Paul uses is a little different from the one that he uses in Galatians 5. What is translated “law of Christ” is more like “in law of Christ.” In fact, the great Greek grammarian A.T. Robertson offers a paraphrase of this, “not being an outlaw of God, but an in-law of Christ.” Christians are joined to Christ. We are not under a code on stone tablets, but under the authority of a living person. We’re joined to Him. We are in Christ. We are in-lawed to Christ. He is our model. His character and conduct are our standard for living. But there is something more to it than that. His life is not only a model to us, a standard to us. His life is actually in us. We’re joined to Him personally.

Through the Holy Spirit, Christ lives in us and directs us in our path and behavior. He enables us to act. He creates in us the virtue of love. He gives wisdom. It’s spontaneous. It’s natural in a supernatural way. In other words, he shows us how to apply the principles of the Christian life to the various circumstances of life. How to circumcise a Timothy and not a Titus. And then there are objective principles of behavior for Christians, rules, laws. We have them in the example of Christ that He gives in the four gospels and in His instruction through the apostles and the inspired writers of Scripture of the New Testament. All of that is what governs our lives, the principles that are set forth there.

And moral principles are inflexible. Nine of the ten commandments are repeated in the New Testament. The fourth commandment, the sabbath law, isn’t. That’s debated among good men, but here we are not sabbatarian. We don’t believe

we’re under the sabbath law. Having said that, though, in Hebrews 10:25, we’re told not to forsake the assembling together. We’re not to forsake getting together with the saints on the Lord’s day. In other words, we are to be in church on Sunday. These are binding rules. These aren’t optional things. Sin can never be excused or rationalized. Paul would never have compromised ethics in an attempt to evangelize. But in matters of indifference, in what we describe as the gray areas, he was flexible. He would observe the sabbath when he was in the company of Jews, but he would feel no compulsion to do that when he was with the Gentiles. He did what was appropriate for the situation. He adapted to changing circumstances, and all of that for the sake of the gospel. That’s what ruled in his mind. Paul was a free man. He was truly free. He was free from the law of Moses. He says that in verse 21. He was free not to observe the dietary laws, the sabbath law, all of that. But at the same time, he was also free to observe them. So when he went to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, he was free to take a vow, cut his hair, and worship at the temple.

There are some who have criticized Paul severely for that, saying Paul was wrong. Paul did this out of pride. Paul did it for some other reason they may give. But Paul was wrong to do that. Paul was not wrong to do that. Paul was perfectly free to do that and he did it for the right reason. He did it to demonstrate his solidarity with the Jewish people that he was not an opponent of the law of Moses, he understood the law of Moses, respected the law of Moses, and even used the law of Moses properly in the new dispensation, new covenant in which we live. But he is free to do that.

Paul was free to live like a Jew if he so desired and certainly if it would promote the gospel among men. He did the same among the Gentiles. He lived in a way that made them feel comfortable, just as he did with the Jews. And he did it among the weak, he says in verse 22. And that really gets to the main point of his concern here in chapter 9. “To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak;” Paul could get down to their level. When certain food or beverages offended people, he passed on them. He drank water rather than wine. He ate vegetables rather than meat. He adjusted the depth of his teaching to the condition of his audience.

Paul was a brilliant man. He understood the Old Testament. He understood the law and the prophets. He understood the promises. He understood the new

covenant and the theology of it. He understood, I think it’s fair to say, more than anyone. And yet he is very patient. He didn’t try to force on people with very little understanding doctrines that they weren’t ready to hear. He gave milk instead. Rather than meat, he gave them milk. He reinforced the basics. He never compromised the gospel, but he would come down to them in any way in his teaching, in his conduct, if it would help them come to Christ and grow up in Christ. He sums up his policy in the statement, “I have become all things to all men.” He would meet people, the Jew or the Gentile, the weak or the strong, where they were in order to lift them up and help them become Christians and help them become mature Christians. He’d sacrifice himself, his rights, his privileges, his pleasures, to do that.

Now to some people, that might appear to be an inconsistent life. It might even appear to them to be a hypocritical life. F.F. Bruce in his commentary answers that accusation by quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote that “foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” It may seem noble to have fixed opinions on everything and never yield. Not going to violate my principles. That makes things kind of easy, when you think about it. You’ve got an answer for everything. You know the right thing to do always, you think. And you never vary on it. But that can be damaging. That can be unhealthful. That can close a door to the gospel when it’s not necessary. There are some things that we’re to be flexible on. Paul knew when to do that. A wise man, a wise woman, knows when and how to apply the principles of the Christian life. Some things are inflexible. We can never lie. Christianity doesn’t embrace a kind of situation ethics, where we have a mushy idea of love and we can apply the rules that are inflexible such as rules against lying or cheating. We can’t do that. Paul didn’t do that. We don’t do that. But there are many things that are flexible. And Paul was able to apply them.

I’ll give you an example of what I’m talking about from my own experience. About 20 years ago, I was asked to participate in the wedding ceremony of a couple that attended Believers Chapel. They had attended for some years and the bride was from another city in another state and both of them wanted a Christian witness in the service, and they knew that I would present the gospel, so they asked me to have a part in it. Church was a beautiful old Gothic building and the services there were conducted with some formality. The senior minister who participated in the

ceremony with me wore a robe when he preached. And the bride knew – well, she let me know that this was what her mother wanted me to do, wanted me to also wear a robe, but she knew that that wasn’t my custom, the bride did. Knew that I didn’t think that that’s necessary, which I don’t.

I think that such things as vestments suggest a hierarchy in the body of Christ that isn’t there and that I don’t believe in. We are all believer priests. We are all equal in Christ. I stand in the pulpit not as in the authority of an office, but in the exercise of a gift. We all have our gifts. We all use them. We should. We’re all equal in Christ. And the idea of robes seems to make this clergy-laity distinction, which I don’t think is proper. That’s my conviction.

Nevertheless, from what she informed me, I knew that the mother of the bride wanted that. It was important to her. It was what she thought was appropriate to the occasion. Now, robes are nothing and it was not the time or place to try to explain my thoughts or my convictions to her on vestments. Probably wouldn’t have made much of an impression on her and would, if anything, have had a negative effect. So I agreed to do it. I thought that would be a better testimony than refusing on principle and disappointing them on what was such an important day to her. Now if I had been asked to not mention the name of Christ in the ceremony, I would have refused. We cannot compromise the truth. But in non-moral issues, in the non-essentials, we should be ready to adjust.

That’s what Paul did. What governed his actions was his testimony. He did whatever was necessary and legitimate to help the weak grow and bring the unbelieving to Christ. “I have become all things to all men, so that I might by all means save some.” That was more important to him than having his way, than enjoying his rights or making his point. He wasn’t distracted by hobgoblins. Paul was glad to give up some material benefit or pleasure to win the lost for Christ and to help the weak grow. That was the most important thing to him, to promote the gospel. As he says here at the end in verse 23, “I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.” So that I may participate in giving it. So that I won’t shut a door to the Jew or shut a door to the Gentile unnecessarily. The gospel is going to offend many people and it will shut the door in and of itself. Well, why shut it before we even get a chance to give it? And so Paul says, “I’ll do whatever it takes within what is permitted to present the gospel.”

So all of this brings us to the question, what do we care about? Do we care about our freedom? We should. We should guard our freedom. But do we care about Christian freedom more than we care about Christian people? Or winning people to Christ? Paul didn’t. He waived his rights as an apostle for the well being of others. It was his joy to do that. It was his boast and reward because in that way, he took the burden of ministry off others and was used in the salvation of the lost. That was his great concern. Paul was a soul winner and his lesson here is that we should be, too. Only God teaches to do that, to make our sacrifices for the weak, to help them become strong, and make sacrifices that will give others the opportunity to hear the gospel and see the gospel in us. May He teach us to love the lost as Paul did.

Well, it may be that there are some here this morning who are lost, who don’t know Christ. That’s who the lost are. They may be grossly rebellious. They may not be grossly rebellious. They may be quite moral orderly people. But if they don’t know Christ, if you don’t know Christ, if you’ve never believed in Him, you are lost. And that terrible reality that Spurgeon spoke about, hell, is what awaits you. And so we invite you to come to Christ, to look to Him, to trust in Him. Solomon tells us that he who wins souls is wise, but also it’s true that he who is won is wise. He who believes is very wise because he or she has traded death for life, this flawed life for eternal life. So look to Him. Believe in Him. May God help you do that, to trust in Christ, God’s Son, and help all of us to live for Him and serve His people. Let’s pray.

Father, we do pray that, for ourselves, that we would have a great desire to serve you, to serve you faithfully, to make sacrifices. You blessed us with new life in Christ, and in Him we are free. We have freedom in regard to the law of Moses. We have freedom in the sense that we’ve got power, supernatural power, to live a life that pleases you and is helpful to those around us. Give us a desire to do that, not to live for ourselves, but to live for others and chiefly to live for you, to live to Your glory. And if we do that, Father, we will serve you and be a blessing to those around us. So we pray for that, Lord. Change us. Give us a desire to serve You faithfully and bless others. And we pray these things in Christ’s name, Amen.