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Sermon Notes

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The Self-Denial Required to Win the Lost

1 Corinthians 9:15-27

I. What Made Paul a Great Evangelist?

What is a GREAT EVANGELIST? For years, I have turned to church history to help me answer that question

One of the greatest evangelists of all time was George Whitefield, a English man who lived in the colonial era – the first half of the 18th century – and who crossed the Atlantic Ocean thirteen times in a sailing vessel to preach the gospel both in America and in Great Britain, leading thousands of people to Christ... his relentlessness for the cause of the gospel is astonishing: a man whose voice was so powerful, Benjamin Franklin estimates that he was heard clearly by over 30,000 people – and that without the electronic amplification we are used to... this man preached over 18,000 sermons in his lifetime to over ten million people. He was truly a great evangelist.

Or D.L. Moody, the revivalist preacher of the 19th century, who made a commitment to the Lord to not go to bed every single day without having spoken to at least one person about the gospel; a man who organized gospel meetings in cities across the United States and Great Britain, who traveled over one million miles and preached the gospel of Christ to over 100 million people in his lifetime. He was truly a great evangelist.

Perhaps none of you have heard of the great Chinese evangelist, John Sung... a brilliant man who earned a Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree and PhD in Chemistry, all in 5 years; who was immersed in liberal theology at Union Seminary that denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ; but then John Sung was suddenly and radically converted to biblical faith and was so on fire for Jesus that the liberal school authorities concluded he had gone insane and locked him up in an insane asylum for 193 days... during that time, John Sung read through the entire Bible over 40 times and was prepared by God for his life as an evangelist... he was released from the asylum, returned to China in November of 1927 and began preaching boldly for Christ in the Min-Nan region... over the next seventeen years until his death from tuberculosis in 1944, it is estimated

that he led over 200,000 Chinese people to faith in Christ. He was truly a great evangelist.

Or again in our lifetime, Billy Graham who died in February of 2018 at the age of 99... the greatest evangelist of the 20th century... a man who was heard in person by more than any other preacher of the gospel in the history of Christianity... over 215 million people in 185 different countries, not counting the hundreds of millions he reached through radio, television, and the books he wrote. He was truly a great evangelist.

George Whitefield, D.L. Moody, John Sung, Billy Graham... all of them were great evangelists... but I feel certain that all of them would say they did not come close to equaling the level of the greatest evangelist the Christian church has ever known... the Apostle Paul.

What made Paul such a great evangelist?

A. Heavenly Message

1. Without the accurate gospel of Jesus Christ, all evangelism is worthless
2. Paul received the true gospel by a revelation from heaven, and never swerved from it

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

1 Corinthians 2:2 I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

B. Compelling Motive

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

C. Divine Calling (on the Road to Damascus)

Acts 9:6 get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Acts 9:15 the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

D. Great Boldness

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes

Paul was astonishingly bold... even willing to preach to crazed mobs of people who wanted to see him dead.

E. Power of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

F. Clear Strategy

Acts 17:17 he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there

1. Every town, village or city he entered, he always went to the synagogue first to reason there with the Jews based on the Old Testament scriptures, proving that Jesus was the Messiah
2. He would recruit fellow laborers among the Jews
3. Then would reason in the marketplace day by day with the Gentiles who gathered there

G. Love for People

2 Corinthians 5:14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

1. He had an amazing love for the lost
2. He considered himself IN DEBT to all lost people

Romans 1:14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

3. He even said that he was filled with “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” for the lost among his people, the Jews... and was even willing to trade his salvation if it meant they would have eternal life

H. Single-Minded Zeal

***Acts 14:19-21 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.
²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back***

into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. ²¹ They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples.

I. Willingness to Sacrifice Everything to Win the Lost

1. This brings us neatly to the very passage we're studying this morning
2. Paul was willing to **“become all things to all people”** in order to win some to Christ
3. Nothing of all his life circumstances or personal freedoms—money, possessions, tastes, free time... nothing meant anything except insofar as it was useful for winning the lost

II. Context: Love Limits Liberty

A. 1 Corinthians 8-10

1 Corinthians 8:1 Now about food sacrificed to idols...

1. Some Corinthians Christians, rightly instructed about idols and the freedom we have to eat any food we want were **FLAUNTING** their freedoms and hurting weaker brothers and sisters as a result
2. So Paul was making an extended case that the freedoms we have in Christ have a boundary... the **LIMITS OF LOVE**
3. Be willing to forsake your freedoms for the sake of other Christians

1 Corinthians 8:9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

B. Paul's Personal Example #1: The Right to Be Financially Supported through the Church

1. 1 Corinthians 9:1-14... Paul asserts multiple reasons why he had the right to be supported by the churches he planted... including the Corinthian church
2. **BUT... vs. 15-18 I HAVE NOT USED MY RIGHTS**

1 Corinthians 9:15-16 But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me.

- a. Paul had voluntarily given up his rights to financial support from the Gentile churches he was planting
- b. He did this **VOLUNTARILY**... it was by no means the custom, even among the other apostles

- c. And (vs. 15) he wasn't trying to manipulate them to give him money... he wasn't using guilt or tricking them by what he was writing
- d. FAR FROM IT! This was a point of HONOR for him, like a pledge he had made to the Lord
- e. It made it very obvious that he was not some religious HUCKSTER using people's religious desires as a platform to fleece them and become wealthy

3. Paul was COMPELLED to preach... he had no choice

1 Corinthians 9:16-17 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.

- a. Paul knew that the Lord Jesus could have killed him on the Road to Damascus
- b. He knew that his life was forfeit forever to the overpowering will of Christ
- c. "Woe to me if I don't preach the gospel" = the Lord will hunt me down, and force me or kill me... I have no power to say no to Jesus Christ
- d. Remember Jonah... who tried to evade God's call on his life to preach to Nineveh? God hunted him down and used his sovereign control over the wind and waves and the sailors and the giant fish to force him to do exactly what God wanted him to do
- e. Remember Jeremiah... who was called by God to preach messages to a people who would HATE him and reject all his words... Jeremiah wanted to resign, to stop preaching... he said God had tricked him

Jeremiah 20:7-9 O LORD, you deceived; me, and I was deceived you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me... the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. ⁹ But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

4. So, Paul was saying "My boast in my service is not that I preach at all... I have no choice but to preach. But my true boast in my service to the Lord is that I offer the gospel FREE OF CHARGE... I do NOT use my rights and my liberties"

1 Corinthians 9:18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

Paul was able to look skeptical Gentiles in the eye and say “I’m NOT in this for the money!”

C. This is the Basic Principle: Love Limits Liberty

Paul was willing to limit his rights and privileges and freedoms for the sake of 1) the church – his brothers and sisters in Christ; 2) the LOST... to win them to Christ

Martin Luther, 1520, “On the Freedom of the Christian”

Two basic propositions:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

D. Paul made himself a slave to everyone for the sake of winning them to Christ

III. Paul Enslaved Himself to Everyone to Win Some to Christ

A. Basic Assertion

1 Corinthians 9:19 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

1. Paul is free... he doesn’t owe anybody anything
2. Even if he were imprisoned, as he was again and again, his heart was free in Christ... free from sin, free from death, free from the ceremonial law of Moses, free from fear... FREE FREE FREE
3. Paul was under no obligation to do anything when it came to eating, drinking, clothing, what he did with his time, whether or not to get married, where to live, what he enjoyed... he was a FREE MAN
4. BUT he voluntarily restricted his freedoms to win as many souls as possible to Christ

B. “Gain” = business term, like profit vs loss

1. Paul’s “business” was not making a financial profit through his tentmaking or even through religion
2. The “profit” from Paul’s relentless pursuit was SOULS
3. Winning a lost soul from Satan’s dark kingdom... gaining those precious souls for eternity

Colossians 1:13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves

4. Whatever he could do with his personal life to win lost people
5. This is yet another example of the basic principle: LOVE LIMITS LIBERTY

C. Becoming Like a Jew to Win the Jews

1 Corinthians 9:20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.

1. Paul was raised under the strictest sect of Judaism... he has been “a Pharisee of Pharisees”; he understood the minutiae of the Law
2. He knew that the death of Christ had destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of regulations in the Law of Moses... circumcision, the dietary laws, the Sabbath regulations, the dress codes, what they did with their hair and beards to mark them out as God’s peculiar people
3. All of those ceremonial regulations were now FULFILLED in Christ and ABOLISHED... they were obsolete!
4. So Paul said “**I myself am not under the Law**”... I can eat pork, I don’t have to obey the priestly regulations about the Sabbath, I can trim the corners of my beard and the hair on my head... all those Jewish regulations are DONE... I’m a FREE MAN...
5. BUT... when I want to win some Jews to Christ, I voluntarily give up my freedoms so as not to offend the Jews
 - a. I keep kosher with my eating; I will eat only those things a Pharisee would eat
 - b. I follow the Sabbath patterns... I regard one day as sacred with the same rituals I had when I was growing up
 - c. When I visit the synagogue, I follow all the patterns and habits and rituals so as not to offend them
6. This was the approach he consistently followed when seeking to reach the Jews
 - a. Like the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 decreed that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised and obey the Laws of Moses in order to be saved, BUT so as not to give offense to the Jews, they were asked to not eat meat with blood in it, or to drink blood, or to eat meat polluted in ritual idol sacrifices

- b. The reason was so as not to offend the Jews
 - c. That is why Paul circumcised Timothy... a young man with a Jewish mother but with a Gentile father; he'd never been circumcised, and Paul wanted to avoid offending Jews—NOT teaching a false gospel that Timothy HAD to be circumcised in order to be saved
 - d. That's also why Paul took a Jewish vow—the Nazirite vow—and let his hair grow for a time, and paid for some others to have their vows fulfilled (Acts 21)
7. BUT this does NOT mean compromising on any moral law... first and foremost, the gospel of Christ crucified...

1 Corinthians 1:23 we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews

- a. Paul would NEVER compromise on that!
- b. Nor would Paul violate his conscience on any other moral issue... and he would not teach FALSE DOCTRINE concerning these matters... Paul would speak his freedoms when the time came; but he would RESTRICT his freedoms in his actions to win as many Jews as possible to faith in Christ

D. Becoming Like a Gentile to Win the Gentiles

1 Corinthians 9:21-22 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

- 1. By the same token, Paul turned around and behaved quite differently when he was at the home of a Gentile family
- 2. If they served pork, he would eat it... he would not refuse
- 3. You may ask, "What if he HATED it? What if it was REPULSIVE to him?"
 - a. Remember the Apostle Peter had a vision of a sheet lowered from heaven

Acts 10:12-15 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." ¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." ¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

- b. So missionaries taking the gospel to distant lands are frequently given foods to eat that they would never choose for themselves

I remember having dinner with Elizabeth Elliot, who lived among the Huaroni Indians in the Amazonian Jungle, and she ate the most repulsive traditional foods...

She said **"Where he leads, I will follow; what he feeds, I will swallow!"**

4. Paul was "not free, but was under Christ's Law"
 - a. So again, he was not a LAWLESS person, free from the moral law of God
 - b. Also, he was not free to refuse food that people were serving him just because he didn't like it
 - c. He submitted to the work of the mission and ate whatever they served him... he acted like there was no Sabbath if they were working that day; he fit into Gentile patterns of life

E. The Weak

1 Corinthians 9:22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.

1. This is the very point he's been making
2. If someone would be offended by what he did or didn't do, he would ACCOMMODATE HIS FREEDOMS TO THEIR TASTES

F. Overall Principle

1 Corinthians 9:22-23 I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

1. Becoming "all things to all people" is the calling of the gospel
2. It is the call of love... to turn your back on your preferences, your pleasures, your desires, your scruples, your tastes... and fit in with the people you're trying to reach

Hudson Taylor: as a missionary, he was the first to "go native," to wear Chinese clothing, to shave his head and wear the traditional pony tail, to look no different whatsoever from a native Chinese man...

"I become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some"

3. WHY? To share in the blessings of the gospel

1 Corinthians 9:23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

This is what Paul felt was necessary to have a full harvest among both Jews and Gentiles

A person who is selfish and cares only for their own pleasures will not win many people to Christ

There is a level of self-sacrifice that is ESSENTIAL to winning souls for Christ

IV. Self-Discipline for the Sake of the Gospel

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

V. Applications

A. How Does this Text Challenge You in Evangelism?

1. Paul was willing to sacrifice anything other than the truth to win souls for Christ
2. He was willing to go back to the strictest patterns of Judaism and live according to them in order to win Jews to Christ
3. He was willing to eat foods he didn't like, follow rituals and customs he hadn't grown up with, learn patterns of behavior that were alien to him to win Gentiles to Christ
4. What about you? Each of us has to ask this of ourselves... I think we PROTECT ourselves from the cost of evangelism... we KNOW it's going to mean sacrifices of time, energy, money... and
5. The question that searches each of us from this text, What of our freedoms and preferences are you willing to sacrifice to be an instrument in the hands of God to lead lost people to Christ?
6. We are surrounded every single day here in the Raleigh-Durham area with unchurched people, lost people... to reach them we must step outside of our comfort zone

- a. Workplace: what patterns would you have to change at work to win some people to Christ? Could it be some new conversations, new ways of engaging people in spiritual conversations? Could it be meeting a felt need? Perhaps visiting a sick co-worker in the hospital? Or helping someone with some project at their home?
 - b. Neighborhood: what patterns would you have to change to get to know your neighbors better? Could it be hospitality? Asking some neighbors over for dinner?
 - c. Downtown Durham or Raleigh or Chapel Hill: frequenting coffee shops and restaurants and boutiques and engaging the owners or workers in spiritual conversations
- 7. Perhaps an ongoing ministry... PSS, working with them in crisis pregnancies and using that as a platform for sharing the gospel with the lost; prison ministry... Durham Rescue Mission
 - 8. Perhaps volunteering with our own ministries... like International Connections or the Caring Center

B. Mission Trips

- 1. Perhaps God may use this chapter to challenge you to go on a short-term mission trip... to go to

C. Service Projects: Disaster relief... Baptist Men or Baptist Global Relief

D. Bottom Line: on Judgment Day, our Lord will speak to us about what we did to seek and save the lost; this chapter shows us that we cannot be instruments in winning some to Christ without being willing to give up some freedoms, some privileges, some preferences

- 1. Many of us are TOO BUSY with our lives, too bust with family activities, with our kids' sports or music or our own agendas
- 2. 1 Corinthians 9 challenges us to get out of our self-focused bubble and win lost people to Christ

E. A Direct Appeal to the Lost RIGHT NOW...