

## How Far Will You Go?

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

February 7, 2021

Welcome again to worship today. I invite you to turn to page 4 in your bulletin or your spiritual journal if you are at home.

Of course, today is the Super Bowl. Players and coaches for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Kansas City Chiefs have been preparing for this day for almost a year, you could say even their whole careers. Thirty other teams did too, just not as well. And the Bengals, well, that's another level of "not as well". Most, if not all the players, have sacrificed their health – today's health and their future health – in pursuit of playing today.

Additionally, companies and advertising agencies have been meeting and planning for months and months. Concepts were created, millions of dollars were spent to produce and then shoot the ads this past Fall. Millions will be spent to even air the commercial.

And today will be the first Super Bowl where there will be a female official. Sarah Thomas will patrol the sidelines today, which I think is awesome.

These people, and many, many others, have put everything they have for this one day. And why?

All for a game! A game. A game a bunch of 10-year-olds could play. A game that they will give everything, and I mean everything they have in them, to win. And yes, while this day has been analyzed before a single snap, then analyzed after the final whistle, it is still a game, and a game that will be forgotten, that will not do a thing to improve the plight of the poor or save someone from suicide or help a family become whole again. It will make rich people richer, and poor people poorer.

But it's the Super Bowl, you say Gary. The most important game of the year. Yeah, I know.

You see, we in American often get distracted on what's most important. Congress and Washington waste time on frivolous, partisan bickering, while problems get worse for the American people. We have smart phones and apps, video games and game consoles, that keep us from interacting with our family and others, or getting outside for exercise and fresh air. We have ads on TV that tell us we have to buy this new car or that line of clothing or this beverage or that drug that will cure some disease we've never heard of. And of course, we all need to purchase that expiring extended warranty on our cars that we keep getting calls for.

In all this distraction, even the church has a times gotten distracted. We do all this stuff and forget what is most important. And what is that, if I asked you? What is the most important thing for the church to do? If you don't know, then you are distracted, and I am failing as your pastor.

The most important thing for the church to do – above everything else we do, and by which we should decide if we should even do it – is this:

*Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands [Jesus gave us].<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT2), modified

Paul knew exactly what was the most important thing to do. And he knew how to do it. And in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, he tells us. I will be reading today from the New Century Version:

*I am free and belong to no one. But I make myself a slave to all people to win as many as I can. To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews. I myself am not ruled by the law. But to those who are ruled by the law I became like a person who is ruled by the law. I did this to win those who are ruled by the law. To those who are without the law I became like a person who is without the law. I did this to win those people who are without the law. (But really, I am not without God's law—I am ruled by Christ's law.) To those who are weak, I became weak so I could win the weak. I have become all things to all people so I could save some of them in any way possible. I do all this because of the Good News and so I can share in its blessings.<sup>2</sup>*

When I read this passage, I am amazed at what it says, the lengths that Paul would go to accomplish the call of God on his life. Let's look at the four things Paul will do for the Lord, then ask ourselves how far will we go for the cause of Christ.

In your bulletin, you see a table. (Myra hates it when I use these tables!) You will see 2 columns labeled "Paul was willing to be" and "We must be willing to."

**The first thing Paul was willing to be was a slave.**

Verse 19:

*I am free and belong to no one. But I make myself a slave to all people to win as many as I can.<sup>3</sup>*

The Message Bible puts it this way:

*Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people.<sup>4</sup>*

Paul would trade freedom for slavery.

No one wants to become a slave, but for a Jew, to become a slave was to return to the days of bondage in Egypt so many centuries ago. Even Roman rule over Jerusalem and Jewish lands was a despised thing. And don't forget, Paul was also a Roman citizen. Roman citizens did not submit themselves to slavery.

Imagine an African American today saying they would be willing to return to the slavery their ancestors experienced here in American.

Yet, Paul says he give up his freedom to win as many people as he can to the Lord. And the Book of Acts tells us he did that. He spent years in prison because he called people to repentance, told them that only Jesus of Nazareth could save them from their sins, declared beyond a shadow of doubt that no person on earth, no emperor or President or Super Bowl hero is more important in your life than Jesus Christ. No one. You and mine and every life ever born needs Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

So, Paul was willing to be a slave to win people to Christ.

If we are going to follow the Lord's command for the church and our lives as Paul did, then write this down in the right-hand box: we must be willing to **sacrifice our control in our life for God's control**. You and I and the church must be willing to

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NCV)

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19 (NCV)

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19 (MSG)

submit to the Lord and what He calls us to do as we go and make disciples for Jesus Christ. There is nothing more important than that. So, how far will you go?

**The second thing Paul was willing to be was a Jew.**

Verse 20:

*To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews.*<sup>5</sup>

Now, that may sound odd. Paul was already Jew. He doesn't have to become anything.

Oh, but yes, he did. Look at the rest of verse 20:

*I myself am not ruled by the law. But to those who are ruled by the law I became like a person who is ruled by the law. I did this to win those who are ruled by the law.*<sup>6</sup>

For those ruled by the law, he means those under the Old Testament law and religious practices of the Jews. For the Jews' sake Paul conformed to the Jewish law. He did this in Acts 16:3 when he circumcised Timothy and in 18:18, when he followed a Jewish custom of shaving his head.

Paul knew that those things didn't save him, but he did them to help save others by being about to relate to them. He himself no longer felt under the Law, but voluntarily put himself under the Law to reach his people.

And that's what we need to do. So, write down in the righthand box: **We must be willing to reach our people, our FRAN list**: friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors. We already have a relationship with these people, just as Paul did with the Jews.

You know who of your friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors, who need Jesus. I know which of my pilots' club buddies are Christian and who are not, and I try to reach them for Jesus. I know which of my family members need Jesus. Any people I meet as acquaintances, I try to live a Christian life before them, one of joy and peace. And I'm pretty sure only one of my neighbors goes to church, though I may be wrong.

I will do whatever it takes to win these people to Jesus.

PANERA AT ANDERSON HILLS.

So, how far will you go?

**The third thing Paul was willing to be was a non-Jew.**

Verse 21:

*To those who are without the law I became like a person who is without the law. I did this to win those people who are without the law. (But really, I am not without God's law—I am ruled by Christ's law.)*<sup>7</sup>

Now, can you imagine the gravity of this statement? Most Jews would have nothing to do with a Gentile. They didn't talk to them. They didn't eat with them. They looked down upon all Gentiles.

The Message Bible says the nonreligious, loose-living immoralists.<sup>8</sup> These are the people far from God, and who were different from Paul. Paul grew up a Jew, one who was religious, but he determined to become like a person without the Law, without faith.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:20a (NCV)

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:20b (NCV)

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:21 (NCV)

<sup>8</sup> See 1 Corinthians 9:20-21 (MSG)

Now, he didn't actually do what they did. Verse 22 in the Message Bible reads:  
*I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life.*<sup>9</sup>

So, what are we to do? Write in the righthand box: **We must be willing to reach people different from us.**

And you know what? That's hard. We tend to like to be around people who are like us, who agree with us, who are similar to us. It's human nature; it's comfortable to be with people whom we have some kind of connection.

I have to admit I struggle with this one. I know how to find areas of connection with other people. I've been trained to ask the right questions and hopefully find some common thread that could then be used to begin a relationship. But I still have my struggles.

KAIROS

Paul was willing to be the apostle to the Gentiles – to go to people different from him in order to save them. So, how far will you go?

**Finally, Paul was willing to be was weak.**

Verse 22:

*To those who are weak, I became weak so I could win the weak.*<sup>10</sup>

The Message Bible says:

*the defeated, the demoralized—whatever.*<sup>11</sup>

Paul did not strut his victorious Christian life. Instead, he was willing to be weak in order to give them the hope that he found in Christ.

So, what are we to do? Write in the righthand box: **We must be willing to stand with hurting people.**

That means we need to reach the person who is facing a physical health issue. It means we need to reach the person who is weak financially. It means we need to help someone with mental health issues or drug issues. It means to stand beside the weak, not in a position of superiority, but to be the Mother Teresa and be with the weak.

I read a story about a person who used to work in an Emergency Room. The Chief ER doctor was one of the elders at the church this person was a member of. The doctor used to love to have this person help him sew up his patients. And when they did, they would discuss spiritual matters together. Obviously, the patients, who didn't dare move, were obliged to listen to them. The person said: "I can still see his grin as we 'shared' Christ."

So, how far will you go?

Today is the Super Bowl, and people will give everything they have because of it.

We have the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is far more important than a Super Bowl, one that the whole world needs to hear. How far will we go to let go of control in our lives, reach our people, reach people different from us, and stand with hurting people? How far will you go?

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22b (MSG)

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22a (NCV)

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22a (MSG)