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An Enthusiastic Server

IT'S MY
**PLEASURE TO
SERVE!**

1 COR. 9:16-19



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An Enthusiastic Server

"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.

What is my reward then?

That when I preached the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more."

(1 Corinthians 9: 16-19)

Introduction

In this passage, there is a kind of outline of Paul's whole conception of his ministry. He had three key things he wanted to make clear in these verses, lest he became misunderstood. *Firstly*, he feels compelled to explain why he does not take gifts. In the climate that prevailed in that day, for any preacher to refuse money was looked upon with suspicion.

Secondly, he desired to impress upon them that in this business of preaching he was constrained, not just by a desire to preach, but by the consciousness that a sacred trust had been committed to him by God.

And thirdly, he had determined that the gospel would be preached without charge. Paul knew there were those who would say that all this talk was only camouflage and that secretly he was wanting support. So deep was his conviction in this matter that he says he would rather die than receive support. To receive such would make all he had said, his glorying, sound empty and hallow.

Study Outline:

1. The Characteristics of Serving.
2. The Method of Serving.
3. The Discipline of Serving.
4. The Rewards for faithful Serving.

Supplementary Passage: Galatians 2: 1-10.

1. The Characteristics of Serving.

a. Paul regarded ministry as privilege (v. 15).

I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.

When a certain famous American professor retired from his academic chair, he made a speech in which he thanked his university for paying him a salary for so many years for doing work which he would gladly have done for nothing. This does not mean that people must always work for nothing. There are certain obligations that must be fulfilled which cannot be fulfilled for nothing; but it does mean that people should never work primarily for money. People should regard work not as a career of accumulation, but as an opportunity for service. They must see themselves as having a primary duty not to help themselves, but to take up the privilege of serving others for God's sake. Life's purpose is to glorify God. Paul reminded the Church of God at Corinth: *"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* (1 Cor. 10:31).

b. Paul also regarded ministry as a duty (v. 16).

His point of view was that, if he had chosen to be a preacher of the gospel, he might quite legitimately have demanded payment for his work; but he had not chosen the work, it had chosen him. He was constrained by a divine constraint; he was caught up in it, impelled by a power beyond himself - the authority of the Holy Ghost. He makes his great declaration in verse 16, *"Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"* He pronounces judgement upon himself if he fails to accomplish that which was laid upon him by the risen Lord. Loss would be his now and at the Judgement Seat. For him, some calamity, some form of punishment, not specified, would fall upon him if he did not preach.

c. In spite of the fact that he took no payment, Paul knew that every day he received a great reward (v. 17).

If I were doing this on my own initiative, I would deserve payment.

But I have no choice, for God has given me this sacred trust (NLT).

And in the (NKJ) translation - *For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.*

He had the satisfaction of bringing the gospel freely to all who would receive it. It is always true that the real reward of any task is not the financial payment, but the satisfaction of a job well done. That is why the biggest thing in life is to choose not the job with the biggest pay, but the one in which we will find the greatest satisfaction. The great physician and theologian Albert Schweitzer describe the kind of moment which brought him the greatest happiness:

Someone suffering intensely is brought into his hospital. He soothes the man by telling him that he will put him to sleep and will operate on him and all will be well

After the operation, he sits beside the patient waiting for him to regain consciousness. Slowly, the patient opens his eyes and then whispers in sheer wonderment: 'I have no more pain.'

That was it. There was no material reward there, but a satisfaction as deep as the depths of the heart itself.

To have mended one shattered life, to have restored one wanderer to the right way, to have healed one broken heart, to have brought one individual to Christ is not a thing in which the reward can be measured in financial terms; but its joy is beyond all measurement.

***“THERE IS NO HIGHER RELIGION THAN HUMAN SERVICE.
TO WORK FOR THE COMMON GOOD IS THE GREATEST CREED”
Albert Schweitzer***

The words 'willingly' and 'will' must be taken to mean 'choice' or 'consent.' Therefore, if Paul preaches by choice, consenting fully to it, he would receive a reward. But, as it is, he is not preaching by choice, consenting to it, rather, he is preaching by divine compulsion, so clearly a stewardship has been committed to him. One of the main reasons why we have stagnation in the local congregation, (dead saints, inactive, spiritual idleness, and self-exaltation), is that those who serve, don't understand the concept of stewardship. Self-exaltation belongs in the world not the Church. We serve God and one another with our spiritual gifts. This is the essence of sober living.

Hear from Paul at Rome, with regards to our 'Spiritual Gifts':

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith (Rom. 12: 3).

Stewardship defined: "Stewardship is what a man does after he says, 'believe'; it is the acceptance from God of personal responsibility for all of life and life's affairs." Paul carried in his soul a very high and dignified conception of this trust committed to him by God. Listen to

his instruction to the young minister Timothy in 1 Tim. 6:20 - *“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.”* The message is clear. A deposit of truth has been committed. Guard its sacred transmission. This is a lesson for every person who describes himself as a minister. Every minister is a trustee. The truths of God, the ordinances of Heaven, keep these. In other words, keep close to the written word in speech and deeds. We cannot preserve the things of God committed to us through our strength; even those who are ever so well taught cannot keep what they have learned, without the assistance of the Holy Ghost. We serve under the anointing and supervision of the Spirit.

Technology is good and as knowledge increase, applied science has enhanced ministry presentation, but the Holy Ghost still makes the difference in the contemporary church, with all our contemporary music. We are powerless to serve without the Holy Spirit. We read in Zechariah 4:6, *“This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts.”*

2. The Method of Serving.

a. Self-imposed Slavery (v. 19).

In this most remarkable passage, the apostle also makes known to us the methods employed in seeking to win men for Christ. He willingly became **a slave**, working tirelessly on behalf of Christ. In vv. 16-18 he is seen as **a preacher**, and in v.17 as **a steward**. His adoptability to identify himself with all types of humanity, his versatility to get alongside his fellow men, without sacrificing his loyalty to the Lord or surrender principle, are most admirable. What strength of character, what gentleness of spirit, what depths of humility, what expression of love for his fellows, and all in the name of Christ! Enjoying to the full his freedom in Christ, he voluntarily enslaved himself to all, that he might gain as many as possible.

b. Willingness to make adjustments for others (v. 20).

In this verse, we learn how inclusive in ministry Paul was; he was willing to make adjustment for others - *“To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.”* The circumcision of Timothy illustrates this principle in Acts 16:2-3. Timothy was well thought of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium, so Paul wanted him to join him and Silas on the second missionary journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left, for everyone knew that his father was a Greek. Paul was a wise steward of the gospel, when in the Jewish company he would act like them in matters of moral indifference. He would eat

what they ate, refusing what they refused, and possibly refrain from working on the Sabbath, so as not to offend. He placed some limitations on his freedom in Christ:

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify (1Cor. 10:23).

Those who can never see anything but their own point of view and who never make any attempt to understand the mind and hearts of others, will never make good pastors or evangelists or any other Church leaders or even succeed as friends. The ruin souls of men are very important to God; it is our brand - our trademark in kingdom business. We must be willing to abandon our dear religious traditions to get people into the arena of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews and in regard to the law, a strict Pharisee, had undergone a spiritual revolution and was a totally-free man, that's why he was able to do stewardship. Jesus stewardship was to be the savior - Jesus said - *"For the son of Man has come to save that which was lost"* (Matt. 18:11).

c. Endeavour to get alongside people (v. 22).

When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some (NLT).

The 'weak' here refers to the Christians mentioned in chap. 8. Those who were conscientiously 'scrupulous,' very strict, careful to details, even in respect to lawful things, when Paul was around them, he would endeavor to get alongside them, trying to understand their problems, scruples and prejudices. He showed consideration for others conscience.

If anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for 'the earth is the Lord's and all its fullness' (1 Cor. 10:28).

He would refrain from eating meat so as not to offend, accommodating himself to their circumstances, so that he might gain them. Paul's motive was to encourage the weak brother to enter into a greater appreciation of Christian liberty. Therefore, his setting aside all personal considerations, and his showing an amazing interest in all types of people, is all summed up by saying, *"I am made all things to all men."* In our climate when it is said of someone that he is 'all things to all men,' it is usually a criticism, but here it is to his credit, for he hoped thereby to 'save' some. How reminiscent of the Lord Jesus Himself, who could dine with the Pharisees, dine with publicans and sinners, making Himself available to all for their eternal good. How 'available to all' are you? Think about it for a moment! Paul was 'made all things to all men' in

order to help them, to encourage them through to salvation, but never by using methods that would later stumble them in their Christian pathway.

3. The Discipline of Serving.

a. Holy race Participant (v. 24).

*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize?
Run in such a way that you may win (NASB).*

Here in the last portion of the passage, the apostle is going to draw attention to the renunciation of lawful pleasure. This is the discipline of self-control. This has in view the maintenance of personal fitness to carry on the work of God. It was Howard Hendricks who said - "The service that counts is the service that costs." Paul insists to those Corinthians who wanted to take the easy way that no one will ever get anywhere without the sternest self-discipline. Paul was always fascinated by the picture of the athlete. An athlete must train with intensity in order to win the contest. Corinth knew how thrilling contests could be, for at Corinth the Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympic Games, were held. Furthermore, the athlete undergoes this self-discipline and this training to win a crown of laurel leaves that within days will be a withered wreath. How much more should Christians discipline themselves in this holy race, to win the crown which is eternal life.

Paul observes from the games that there were many runners in the race, but only one winner. Then comes the exhortation, "Run ...that you may win." He is drawing attention to two things. *Firstly*, there is no automatic connection between running and winning. *Secondly*, it is open to us all to obtain the prize. 'So, run' demands tremendous effort, concentration, determination, dedication, and resolution. Furthermore, 'run' means calling upon every ounce of energy, putting forth all of one's strength, to emerge as victor. There is no place here for half-heartedness or for the soft, flabby Christian.

Key Note:

"Christians are in the race of faith; we must make spiritual progress."

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us (Heb. 12: 1).

As those who ran in the Olympic races would throw aside everything that might impede them in their course, so Christians professing to go to heaven, must throw aside everything that

might hinder them in the holy race. Paul says Philippians 3:14 - *"I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* The more suitable in character we grow for heaven the faster we must press towards it. Heaven is the prize of the high calling; what we aim at in all we do, and what will reward all our pains. It is of God, from whom we are to expect it. But it is in Christ Jesus and through his hand it must come to us. There is no getting to heaven as our home, but through Christ as the way. And Jesus says, narrow and wide is the gates - *Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it* (Matt. 7:13-14).

Furthermore, he comforts his disgruntled disciples when he was about to leave them, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me"* (John 14: 6). As 'the way' – In him God and man meet, and are brought together. We could not get to the tree of life by the way of innocence, but Christ is our way to it. The disciples followed him, and Christ tells them that while they continued following him, they would never be out of their way. He is '*the truth*' - as truth is opposed to falsehood and error. When a person requires truth, he needs learn no more than the truth as it is in Jesus, as truth is opposed to fallacy and deceit. He is '*the life*' – for we are alive unto God only in and through Jesus Christ. Bottom line, Jesus is the beginning, the middle, and the end. He is the true way to life everlasting. Other ways may seem right as we enjoy the pleasures of this world, but the end of them is the way of death.

a. Discipline the body (v. 27).

To win the fight and to be victorious in the race demands discipline. Note the following self-training:

We have to discipline our bodies - it is one of the neglected facts of the spiritual life that very often spiritual depression springs from simply being physically unfit. If we are going to do our best work in any aspect of life, we must bring to it bodies that are as fit as we can make them.

We have to discipline our minds - it is one of the tragedies of life that many may refuse to think until they become incapable of thinking. We can never solve problems by refusing to see them or by running away from them.

We must discipline our souls - we can do so by facing life's sorrows with calm endurance, its temptations with the strength God gives, and its disappointments with courage.

b. Avoid being disqualified.

The seat of sin lies in the will. The body is the medium through which sin operates. Paul was determined that *“sin will not reign”* Romans 6:12, - *“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts.”* Believers are dead to sin and alive to God. According to the scripture, sin is represented as a king, ruler or tyrant, who has the desires of the mind and the members of the body under his control, so that by influencing the passions he governs the body. Sin should no longer exert dominion, or be the master of Christians, because we are not under law, but grace; saved people are subjects of God’s favor and mercy. Therefore, we *‘keep under’* the body; we apply discipline so as to stop the ready obedience to sin. The strongest measures are so necessary. Paul says that he buffets it, beats it (lit. ‘I give it a black eye’) and thus *“brings it into subjection.”* He makes it his slave, so that he is in complete control. How beneficial is all this and how many have failed just here? If any one of us fails to do this there is the danger of being disqualified; being set aside now in this life, and losing reward at the Judgment Seat. Salvation is not in view, but service.

4. The Rewards of faithful Serving.

a. Humble Service – *And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward* (Matt. 10: 42).

And whoever gives to these little ones – beautiful epithet! Originally taken from Zechariah 13: 7. The reference is to their lowliness in spirit and their littleness in the eyes of an undiscerning world, while high in Heaven’s esteem. **Only a cup of cold water** – meaning, the smallest service. **In the name of a disciple** – or, as it is in Mark (9: 41), because you belong to Christ: from love to Me, and to him from his connection with Me. **Assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward** – There is here a descending climax – *‘a prophet,’ ‘a righteous man,’ ‘a little one’* - signifying that however low we come down in our services to those that are Christ’s, all that is done for His sake, and that bears the stamp of love to His blessed name, will be divinely appreciated and owned and rewarded.

b. Soul-winners – *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever* (Dan. 12: 3).

The epistle of James concludes with an exhortation to do all we can to promote the conversion and salvation of others – *“Brethren, If anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins”* (5: 19-20). Be they ever so great, you must not be afraid to show them their error and be they every so weak and little, you must not disdain to

make them wiser and better. If they wander from the truth, whether it be in opinion or practice, you must endeavor to bring them again to the rule. Errors in judgment and in life generally go together. If we are instrumental in the conversion of any, we are said to convert them, though this be the work of God. In addition, we share in the glory of those that have been assisted to heaven, which will be a great addition to their own glory.

c. No Impartiality with Rewards – *Whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free* (Eph. 6: 8).

Although his master on earth should neglect or abuse him, instead of rewarding him, he will certainly be rewarded by the Lord Christ, **whether he is a slave or free**. Christ regards not differences of men at present; nor will he in the great and final judgment. Masters are under as strict obligations to discharge their duty to their servants as servants are to be obedient and dutiful to them (v. 9). **Giving up threatening or forbearing threatening.** If they should transgress at any time, lean more to the side of mercy than justice; and when you are obliged to punish, let it be as light and as moderate as possible. Let revenge have no part in the chastisement, for that is of the devil, and not of God.

d. Proportionate Rewards – *Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor* (1 Cor. 3: 8).

Who...plants... who waters are one. Both Paul and Apollos had received the same doctrine, preached the same principles, and labored to promote the glory of God in the salvation of souls. Why should there be faction with respect to Paul and Apollos while these apostles are intimately one in spirit, design, and operation? **According to his own labor.** God does not reward His servants according to the success of their labor, because that depends on himself. He rewards them according to the quantum of faithful labor which they bestow on His work. *“He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”* (2 Cor. 9: 6). This is a plain maxim; no man can expect to reap but in proportion as he has sown. And here almsgiving is represented as a seed sown, which will bring forth a crop. If the sowing be liberal and the seed good, the crop will also be good. Sowing was used among the Jews to express almsgiving so, they understood Isaiah 32: 20 - *“Blessed are you who sow beside all waters;”* i.e., whoever is ready to help everyone that is in need. Hosea 10: 12, they interpret - *“Sow to yourselves almsgiving, and ye shall reap in mercy”* – in other words, if you show mercy to the poor, God will show mercy to you.

Contemplative Questions

“No man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was” (Hebrews 5: 4). **Ministry** - illustrate why it is an honorable office?

“For if I do this willingly” (v. 17). How would you make use of this admonition in your personal commitment to Christ?

In an age where preachers are receiving extraordinary sums of money for sermonettes, how does *“present the gospel of Christ without charge”* (v. 18), look to the unconverted”? Explain.

Paul willingly became a **slave**, working tirelessly, and as a **steward**. Describe the characteristics of these in relation to an honest worker (v. 19).

Personal Response

Write out additional reflections questions you may have or a prayer.



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