

# Paul's Motivation

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*1 Corinthians 9:15-18*

## INTRODUCTION

- A. Bobby Dodd, George Tech's athletic director, tells of the coach who, with his team leading 7 to 6 in the last minute of play, carefully instructed his quarterback not to pass under any condition.
  - 1. But when the ball was carried within the opponent's ten-yard line, the quarterback was overcome by temptation.
    - a. He passed and the ball was intercepted by the rival's fastest runner, who broke into an open field and raced toward his team's end zone.
    - b. He was speeding past mid-field when suddenly, out of nowhere, the quarterback who had passed the ball overtook him and brought him down.
  - 2. After the game, the losing coach remarked to his barely victorious counterpart, "I'll never understand how your boy overtook my fastest runner." "Well, I'll tell you," came the reply, "Your back was running for touchdown—my boy was running for his life."
- B. Different motivations cause people to react differently in quite similar circumstances.
  - 1. Motivation is such an important issue that I had an entire three-hour graduate course aimed at helping us preachers learn how the corporate world motivates its workers and how we can motivate individuals in serving the Lord.
  - 2. Paul needed no such course, for he had a zeal—a motivation—which consumed him.
    - a. In the text before us this morning, Paul explains the reasons he did not regularly make use of his rights to be a paid preacher. Sure, he had the right to be paid as a preacher and as an apostle, but his motivation had nothing to do with money.
    - b. What was Paul's motivation? In the text, the apostle speaks of MY REJOICING, MY REQUIREMENT, & MY RESPONSIBILITY.

## MY REJOICING, v. 15

- A. Paul rejoices that no one pays him to preach: "I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting."
- B. Paul affirms that he hasn't made use of the rights to be paid or to take along a wife, nor is he writing to the Corinthian brethren in hopes of getting compensation.
  - 1. Most of the time compensation is the worst motivator under the sun.
    - a. I love baseball, and I'm a diehard New York Yankee fan—it's such a storied franchise. Yet, there are many more people who love to hate the Yankees precisely because George Steinbrenner and company can just about buy any player they want.
    - b. How many of you are angry with Rich Rodriguez for going to Michigan, undoubtedly, in large part, due to money?
    - c. We have an all-volunteer army in this nation. Why? Because our leaders wisely understand that soldiers who readily volunteer for service are going to perform superior to those who have no choice.
  - 2. The same principle works spiritually:
    - a. How many of us would want to sit and learn from someone teaching about eternal truths simply because he was paid enough to do so?
    - b. Jesus spoke about the need to serve him without being motivated by money.

- 1) When Jesus sent out the Twelve on their limited commission, the Lord said: “You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics nor sandals nor a staff, for the laborer deserves his food” (Mt 10:8b-10).
    - a) In this text, Jesus does not deny his apostles the right to compensation. In fact, he declares that the laborer deserves his food, and he points out that the disciples should stay in homes of faithful individuals.
    - b) The Lord does point out, however, that their motivation isn’t to be money. In fact, they are to trust on the Lord for their necessities.
  - 2) Before the Ephesian elders, Paul holds up himself as an example of a worker concerned with doing the Lord’s work and not with his compensation: Acts 20:33-34.
- C. Paul affirms that he would rather die than have anyone deny him his ground for boasting.
1. What was Paul’s ground of boasting?
    - a. It could not conceivably be preaching he does, for he declares in the next verse that preaching the gospel serves as no grounds for boasting.
    - b. Paul’s boasting must be that he preaches the gospel free of charge.
  2. What should we learn from Paul’s rejoicing in preaching for free?
    - a. Money isn’t everything.
      - 1) 1 Tm 6:6-10.
      - 2) One day a certain old, rich man of a miserable disposition visited a renowned teacher, who took the rich man by the hand and led him to a window.
        - a) “Look out there,” he said. The rich man looked into the street. “What do you see?” asked the teacher. “I see men, women, and children,” answered the rich man. Again the rabbi took him by the hand and this time led him to a mirror. “Now what do you see?” “Now I see myself,” the rich man replied.
        - b) Then the teacher said, “Behold, in the window there is glass, and in the mirror there is glass. But the glass of the mirror is covered with a little silver, and no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others, but you see only yourself.”
      - 3) Let us never see silver! May we always see others!
    - b. While money isn’t everything, service counts greatly!
      - 1) Jesus saw service to others as his highest calling and encouraged his disciples to do likewise: Mt 20:25-28.
      - 2) How well are we doing in serving?
        - a) When the phone rings and someone is asking us to prepare food for a bereaved family, do we say, “Sure. What do you need”? Or, do we think, “Well, what’s in this for me?”
        - b) When the elders say that we need another teacher in the back, do we think “I’ll do whatever I can” or do we think “I’m not going to get anything out of it”?

## **MY REQUIREMENT, v. 16**

- A. “If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”
- B. Paul had no ground in boasting in preaching the gospel. Why?
  1. The gospel did not originate with him.
    - a. Quite sarcastically Paul asks the Corinthians: “Was it from you that the word of God came?” (1 Cor 14:36).
    - b. Paul’s gospel came, not from himself, but from God himself: “I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:11-12).

2. Not only did the gospel not originate with Paul, but he was—and is—not the subject of the gospel. He proclaimed the gospel and even wrote many words whereby we can learn God’s plan. But he is not the subject of the gospel—Jesus Christ is!
- C. Necessity was laid upon Paul. Woe to him if he did not preach the gospel.
1. Paul had no option but to preach, for Jesus appointed him to preach.
    - a. Ananias told Saul: “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:14-15).
    - b. While on the road to Damascus, Jesus told Saul: Acts 26:16-18.
  2. Paul pronounced a woe upon himself if he did not preach the gospel.
    - a. “Woe is me” was a quite common phrase in the ancient world when confronted with horrible news.
    - b. For Paul it was utterly unthinkable that he would do anything other than preach the truth.
- D. What is in this passage for us in this age?
1. Necessity is laid upon us that we might preach the gospel.
    - a. Even though the Lord Jesus has not appeared to us to appoint us as apostles, we do have an obligation to teach the gospel.
      - 1) “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20)—The “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” makes that command as applicable to us as it was to the Twelve.
      - 2) “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col 1:28-29).
    - b. Are we cognizant of the responsibility laid upon us?
      - 1) Without any doubt, Paul was quite cognizant of the responsibility laid upon him, and he sought to fulfill that responsibility.
      - 2) What about us?
        - a) Are we willing to invite our friends and co-workers to a Gospel Meeting?
        - b) Are we willing to say to our friends, “Let’s sit down and look at the Scriptures”?
        - c) Some people say that they aren’t capable of teaching others. If you feel that way, are you at least willing to say, “Can I bring someone over who can discuss the Bible with you”?
  2. Are we fulfilling our obligation?

## **MY RESPONSIBILITY, v. 17**

- A. “If I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship.”
- B. Paul had a reward because he preached voluntarily.
1. What was Paul’s reward? The next verse tells us: “What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge.”
  2. The greatest rewards are not in money:
    - a. How many of us would want a doctor treating us whose greatest satisfaction came from the insurance payment and not from helping us recover from illness?
    - b. How many of us would want a teacher spending the day with our children whose greatest reward came from pay and not from seeing that child learn?
    - c. How many of us would want to sit and read these words from Paul this morning if his greatest reward came from being paid and not from being able to say, “Here’s the Word of the Lord”?

3. Is it not the case that our greatest rewards should come from the knowledge that we are serving God and our fellow man?
  - a. What greater reward can we have than serving the Creator who gave his Son to die for us?
    - 1) “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58).
    - 2) The context of that passage is the resurrection of the dead—Paul says that because Jesus has been raised and we shall be raised from our graves, we ought to serve God with everything we have.
    - 2) Why not? He has done so very much for us!
  - b. What greater reward can we have than serving men who bear the image of the great Creator? After service to God, service to man is our highest calling: “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:43-45).
4. William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, lost his eyesight.
  - a. His son Bramwell was given the difficult task of telling his father there would be no recovery.
    - 1) “Do you mean that I am blind?” Booth asked. “I hear we must contemplate that,” his son replied.
    - 2) The father continued, “I shall never see your face again?” “No, probably not in this world.”
    - 3) “Bramwell,” said Booth, I have done what I could for God and people with my eyes. Now I shall do what I can for God without my eyes.”
  - b. Obviously, I do not condone Booth’s teachings—my children have even learned that they don’t put any money in those kettles at Christmas because of the teachings of the group—but I can do nothing but commend the attitude of Booth: forgetting about himself and declaring, “My life is for God.”
    - 1) Where is our service? Is it about me or about God?
    - 2) Do we serve God and our fellow man as faithfully as we ought?
- C. In this text, Paul argues a both/and position.
  1. He had intrinsic reward, for he preached voluntarily—As far as I can tell, while the apostle accepted money from other congregations, he never accepted a dime from the congregation in Corinth. Paul speaks of that intrinsic reward in the next verse.
  2. On the other hand, he did not preach voluntarily, for he had no choice but to preach. Paul spoke of that obligation in the previous verse as he mentioned the necessity laid upon him to preach.
- D. Concerning his obligation, Paul says in this verse: “If not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship.”
  1. The word “stewardship” or “dispensation” in the KJV refers to the task which was given to responsible servants who were appointed over the household’s finances or other responsibility.
    - a. Therefore, Paul sees his preaching as a trust given to him from God.
    - b. The NIV does an excellent job of translating this passage: “If not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.”
  2. Our teaching the gospel is likewise a trust from God.
    - a. Paul often speaks of his teaching the gospel as stewardship from God. There is not a text which compares our obligation to preach to a trust.
    - b. However, there are multiple texts which speak of our obligation to preach the gospel.
      - 1) “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19).
      - 2) “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (Jn. 15:1-2).
      - 3) We sing about our stewardship of the gospel: “Into our hands the gospel is given. Into our

hands is given the light! Haste, let us carry God's precious message, guiding the erring back to the right."

- 4) Are we fulfilling our trust in the gospel?

## **CONCLUSION**

- A. Paul basically summarizes all he has been saying at v. 18: "What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel."
- B. What a reward it is to know that we are doing the right thing!
  1. But, even then we have a reward from God. Paul spoke of his reward: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (1 Tm 4:7-8).
  2. When Jesus comes again, will you see that nail-scarred hand place the crown of righteousness upon your brow?