

Is it okay for a Christian to be competitive? Being competitive can get us into trouble at times (like at athletic events where it harms our testimony!). But it can also be helpful, *if* we are competitive for the right thing in the right way.

Something struck me in reading over our text of study for this evening. Paul uses the word “win” five times in four verses (1 Corinthians 9:19-22):

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to **win** as many as possible. 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. ²¹ 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. ²² To the weak I became weak, to **win** the weak.”

What did Paul mean by win? He shows us in what he said next...

Verses 22b-23, “I have become all things to all men 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**.”

He wanted to be used of God to see people get saved. That’s what winning was to Paul. Seeing people get saved was to “share in its blessings.”

How badly do we want to be winners? How badly do we want to see people get saved? Sadly, my competitive edge gets dull in this area too often. Instead of seeing winning the lost as an Olympic marathon, I start viewing it as a casual walk in the park—something that’s nice to do if you’ve got the time, but no big deal if you don’t.

There’s a price to be paid if we’re serious about winning lost people. We learn what it takes to be a winner in the race of advancing the gospel by listening to Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 9:19-27.

First of all, as we began to see last time, if we’re going to be successful at winning the lost we must deal with one particular hindrance. It has to do with how we view our *rights*.

Review from last time...

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul talks to us about what to do with *our rights* when it comes to living in relationships with other people. We see the following ministry guidelines modeled by Paul in chapter 9.

**We have rights.

**We must be willing to give up our rights at times.

**We must be willing to live as a slave if we want to reach lost people.

I. Paul had rights (1-12a).

A. He deserved the respect of an apostle (1-2).

B. He deserved the privileges of an apostle (3-6).

1. *He had a right for the church to meet his physical needs (4).*

2. *He had a right to marry (5).*

C. He deserved the support of an apostle (7-12a).

1. *Common sense says so (7).*

2. *The Scriptures say so (8-12a).*

Key: Keep in mind the original context. In chapter 8 Paul discussed the controversy of eating meat offered to idols. There is no easy, “pat” answer to this problem. Instead, he stressed the importance of everyone in the church loving each other enough to give up rights. His point in chapter 9 is to show that what he is asking is not beyond what he himself did day after day. He will come back to the subject of meat offered to idols at the end of chapter 10.

II. Paul chose to give up certain rights (12b-18).

A. He knew what his rights were (12b-14).

***Those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (14).*

B. He knew that something was more important than his rights (15-18).

***Preaching the gospel is more important than personal rights (12b, 15-16).*

New material...

III. Paul made himself a slave to everyone (19-27).

Paul was a “free” man, as he states in v 19. That’s what makes his next statement so staggering. What did he make himself? A *slave* to everyone. What’s true of a slave? He has *no rights*. Why would a person with rights give them up and become a person with no rights? That’s what Paul did. But why?

Why did he say he voluntarily became a slave to others? He had three motivations...

A. His motivation was to win people (19-22).

There is no “cookie cutter” approach to winning lost people. People are different. If we are going to reach them, we must go to where they are, not expect them to come to us on our terms. Isn’t that what the incarnation of Jesus is all about? He became one of us. He gave up His rights to reach us.

But since people are different, we can’t reach everyone the same way. People’s backgrounds affect their ability to understand and receive the gospel. So we must reach out to each person right where he is.

That’s what Paul did. In verses 19-22 he shares what he did to reach different kinds of people. He describes how he related to three kinds of people.

1. *He gave up rights to reach those under the law (20).*

Q: What kind of personal sacrifices did Paul make to win Jews? What does it mean to become “like a Jew?” Note: He gives a clue at the end of v 20. He became like one “under the law.” What does that mean? To reach Jews he at times conformed to Jewish law. Some examples...

e.g. Acts 16:3 He circumcised Timothy.

e.g. Acts 18:18 He had his hair cut off because of a vow he had taken.

e.g. Acts 21:20-26 He went through purification rites at the temple along with four others (and paid their way).

2. *He gave up rights to reach those who didn’t have the law (21).*

Now he's talking about Gentiles. Remember Paul himself was a Jew. What kind of barriers did Paul have to cross to reach Gentiles with the gospel? What does he mean when he says he became "like one not having the law?"

Application: Are we willing to come out of our "comfort zones" to reach lost people? One of the biggest barriers has to do with our "mindset." How so?

3. *He gave up rights to reach the weak (22).*

The "weak" are those Paul mentioned in chapter 8, those in the church (and outside) with weak consciences, those people who are bothered by our "freedoms." Paul chose to give up the exercise of certain freedoms at times. For what purpose? Note the end of v 22. What does he mean when he says, "I became all things to all men...to save some?" Describe a real life example of something Paul would have done...

Paul's motivation was to win people. Or to put it another way...

B. His motivation was to see the gospel advance (23).

Read v 23.

Q: What again is the gospel?

Q: What can we do to help the gospel advance?

C. His motivation was to win a prize (24-27).

Paul was aiming for something in his life, a crown, a *prize*.

Read verses 24-25.

1. *Athletes deny themselves to get a temporary crown.*

The summer before my senior year in high school, I ran about 500 miles. I got out of bed five days a week and hit the country roads. Why? I wanted a prize. I wanted to be an all-state cross country runner. I spent hours and hours in that pursuit. And never attained it. Even if I had, the plaque would be sitting in a box, collecting dust somewhere.

2. *Paul denied himself to get an eternal crown.*

Q: What does he say about the crown at the end of v 25?

Q: What did Paul do (and what must we do) to obtain this prize?

•He disciplined his body.

This reward is not for the person who does only what he "feels like doing." Paul says he "beat his body (27)." In addition...

•He made his body his slave.

Q: How do you make your body your slave? What does that have to do with winning lost people?

Q: What was one of Paul's greatest fears? Look at the end of v 27...

•He did not want to be disqualified for the prize.

The Christian life isn't a 100 meter dash, but a marathon. There's no prize for fast-starters in a marathon. The prize goes to the one who finishes well.

The KJV uses the term “castaway.” It’s from the Greek *adokimos* which means “disapproved.” As Schofield comments, “The apostle is writing of service, not of salvation.” Paul already talked about this potential loss back in 3:10-15.

He didn’t want to do anything that would prevent people from hearing the truth of Christ from his lips and life.

One thing’s for sure. You don’t finish the race well if your ambition in life is to make sure you get your “rights.”

Discuss: What are some things we can do to disqualify ourselves from finishing the race well and winning the prize?

Further Discussion:

**What are some practical things we can do as individuals to win lost people in this community?

Prayer Time:

Let’s pray that God would help us see the “rights” we’re clinging to that are keeping us from seeking to win the lost as we should.

Then, let’s pray for opportunities to reach the lost...