

“Ministry and Service: Why am I here and what can I expect?”

**by Pastor Tim Dodson
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1 Corinthians 9 *Am I not an apostle? Am I not free?*

Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my

work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3

My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we have no right to eat and drink? 5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? 7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? 8 Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? 10 Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. 11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? 12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? 14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. 15 But 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. 16 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! 17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. 19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and 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; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Our title today is **“Ministry and Service: Why I am here, and what can I expect?”** In verse 23 of our text, Paul gives us not only the cliff notes answer to that question, but moreover the heart and motivation for not only this specific answer, but for everything that Paul did and for all that he lived: *“...this I do for the gospel's sake.”* What is the cusp of the gospel? Well, that might be a message in and unto itself, but we can look to 1 Peter 3:18 for the answer where we read *“Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.”*

In Paul's life, as we have stated, everything he did, he did *“for the sake of the gospel.”* Moreover, so that the gospel might freely move in any and all situations to effect and transform those who present. Paul, in many ways was an enigma in that he was difficult at times to get our hands around. He grew his hair long, and then he cut it off. He would apparently eat meat in one situation and then not eat it in another. He would mix with Jews as a Jew and then seemingly mix with Gentiles as a Gentile. He seemingly walked a razor thin line in his attempts to be *“all things, to all men.”*

In chapter 8, we heard Paul instruct the Corinthian believers as well as us here today, that we are to be innately sensitive to those around us, with a desire to not cause hurt or harm...to not “stumble” others in the exercise of what we believe and feel free to do. Ever willing to personally step into the fray, Paul in chapter 9 put’s himself “out there” as an example and gives an illustration of how such an ideal is to play out in real life.

Paul, like a lot of pastors that have followed, was criticized by folks in a “damned if you do and damned if you don’t” scenario. They said he wasn’t a “real” pastor because he wasn’t taking a salary, and then on the other side he was accused of being in the ministry just for the money. Now we clearly see that Paul herein argues that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. But we also hear him say that despite such, he did not exercise that right...*and many other rights he lists herein*, because he did not want to cause confusion and issues with those to who he was trying to share the gospel.

Certainly we as Pastors and Ministers need to understand that we do not preach the Gospel because we are paid. It must never be so. That is not to say that there are not those who attempt such, though for the life of me, I cannot understand it even from a practical standpoint. Surely there are innumerable ways to make a living that exudes far less stress, much clearer pictures of success, and has far less of a daily “body blow” to an individual than that of ministry! Not to mention the fact that the pastors here make 60% to 80% of a Macdonalds manager salary, and even that MacDonal’d’s position is 20% below the national income average. But we are never to be a “hired” preacher...we are never to be a hireling. When one allows themselves to think in such a way, it is inevitable that at some point the individual will be swayed by a self-entitlement and will leave the ministry. This goes on every day in the greater church world. There have been those who held this thinking, and are no longer in the ministry and rightfully so.

(9:1-2) Paul confirms he is indeed an apostle and that those in Corinth are the “fruit that remained” as proof of his calling. Many of us have the belief we are serving Christ, but when we step back and look at such quantifiably, there is nothing truly there. We have nothing that remains through the fires of testing. 1Co 3:13 *“...each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.”*

Paul was exercising his authority as the senior pastor of that fellowship. He had “birthed”, fed, and nurtured the people who made up that fellowship. He rightfully felt this gave him the parental right to speak in a corrective manner toward these saints. Many, *especially in our day*, will argue this position and will deny a pastor’s right to do this. Paul was not going to acquiesce to such thinking, however. He was going to do his job even if he was not received.

(9:3-5) Paul begins by exerting his freedom as a child of God, saying, “Do we not have a right...?” By the way, verse five is a damaging text to the doctrine of Catholicism. These apostles were married. He also mentions Jesus had brothers, which rejects the idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary. He goes on to mention that Peter was married, dispelling the Catholic idea demanding an unmarried state.

(9:6-12) Paul often did not receive pastoral support or he did not accept it. Scripture records how he often worked at secular work in order to keep ministering, yet his point in this passage is not any less valid. I myself worked in the ministry for years without a dime of financial support, and I did not care. I was thrilled to be in the service of the Kingdom on any level. We have adopted this principle here in the church...within its brick and mortar facility, as well as its missions endeavors, that if the ministry is young or small, that the minister needs to work secularly in order to support himself. That principle doesn’t fly too well in some developing countries in which we endeavor, where to do such is a cultural issue, meaning pastors feel that they will not be

respected if they work secularly. We don't care if it IS an issue, as the bible must supersede such secular thinking. So we will not financially support ministers who *need* money but refuse to work.

The fact is, many many pastors around the world will work all week long for the blessing of serving in the ministry on the weekends, and they will do it for their whole ministerial careers. They work all day at secular work so they might eat, and then spend their evenings and weekends serving the Kingdom of God. They, *like Paul*, are willing to endure this for the furtherance of the gospel and in obedience to their calling. God is not promising a paycheck or any other creature comfort for our efforts in ministry. However, when a church gets big enough, and begins to consume a ministers time throughout the week, it's time to support that minister financially.

However, one must be able to ask themselves why they serve, and be able to answer such with a clear conscience. With or without any remuneration, we are called upon to serve the body of Christ. We cannot truly consider ourselves a servant if we must gain materially because of it.

(9:13-14) Certainly Paul, as well as the average pastor, might be accused of teaching all of this through self-interest. It's difficult to avoid the appearance of self-serving. But Paul was seeking to teach the truth whether it made him look bad or good. If it was God's truth, he never felt he had to avoid it or apologize for it.

(9:15-18) Having defended his right to be supported by the church, Paul makes it clear that he does not teach this for his own benefit. His point was that even though he *had* the right, he did not *demand* it. Why? Because of a higher issue, a greater power in play. Paul's motive was not to get something materially or even some intangible respect, but rather to obey God and glorify Him.

In this simple illustration, Paul was trying to draw a clear picture that just because something is *right*, doesn't mean it is in the best interest of the kingdom of God, nor is there any guarantee it will bring glory to God. There is a time and place for the exercise of our freedoms, and care must be given as a believer not to shove our freedom down the throats of all bystanders. If we have a higher motivation, a greater love than for ourselves, we act contrary to our raging self-interest. Instead we act in the love of God and are driven to exercise that same love toward His children.

Paul says if this was his idea, perhaps he would be owed something for his great sacrifice. To act in such a way was against his nature, though. This "God-first" attitude was actually an assignment from God, and Paul, driven by his love for Christ, was compelled to obey. His reward was the chance to share God's love with another. How can he claim credit or receive praise for doing his duty, for just loving His Lord?

(9:19-23) Paul loved his fellow man, but his supreme motivation was obedience to the God he loved even more than men. He made himself a servant to all so that he might win more to God. It was not his freedoms or rights that were tantamount now. The primary issue was the eternal state, the eternal destiny of those around him. Paul, out of love, set himself aside and did whatever was necessary to win others to Christ. He saw himself as not a volunteer, but rather a conscript. He did what he did because he *had* to.

Please note that Paul is not inferring that he pretended or became a fake so he could lull people to Christ under false pretenses. It means he made every effort to communicate with those he met in whatever terms they could understand and whatever method they could relate to. Paul was saying he was willing to go with whatever situation would arise. Even though he saw *his* way as the right way to think and act, he was unwilling to force his stance on another if it meant he ran the chance of alienating that person from him and ultimately from God.

His bottom line was to open an earthly door to a heavenly Spirit, and to not get in the way of the Spirit by demanding *his* rights, *his* way.

Paul is not referring to the unmovable and undebatable scriptural mandates here. He is not suggesting we get cozy with the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the plethora of false churches, or even the liberal Jesus-lite message that is being dished out today. He is referring to the unredeemed man, all who dress differently, think differently, and *are* different from one another. It was not so much that he was *flexible*, as much as he was *adaptable*. It's not a different gospel, just a different way to serve it up. Paul was not averse to serving it from fine china or a paper plate. He was willing to adapt, for the gospel's sake, and so that he might also be a partaker of it with one who was lost.

(9:24-27) Paul closes out this chapter by laying out the "why" in all of this, which is to *win*. It doesn't matter unless you win. The race you and I are running is not against other people, but against Satan, against this world, and against ourselves.

Indeed many people have begun the race, but dropped out halfway. Many run even now like it is a sack-race at a Boy Scout picnic instead of the race of our lives! A serious runner will be concerned with all the issues that might ultimately make him a slower runner. Any indulgence that would prohibit him from winning is set aside. This is done because winning the race is the bottom line for the champion.

Some might say, "Well, I don't need to win; I'll be happy to just finish." But that's not the point. If you ignore this passage, ignore this book and indulge in every freedom to your heart's content, you run a high risk of *not* finishing at all. There are SO many in that category. Paul ran to *win*.

To win, I must have self-discipline, body and mind. The runner is able to do as he pleases, for he is free. But whether he wins, that is a different issue. What he eats, how he spends his time...whether he trains enough, works hard enough, and prepares his mind and body adequately, all of this determines whether he will win or ultimately drop out.

Many of us are more like video game players than runners. We just *pretend* to play the game. Sitting on our couches with a bag of chips, we "run" the court, up and down, shooting baskets and being a "winner." But it isn't real. We don't even run the race sitting here in a Sunday morning pew. It involves early morning, get-out-of-bed training, which is one-on-one between you and Jesus.

We will often make sacrifices to gain earthly things, but the thought of doing the same for Christ seems to be a whole other matter.. Few will sacrifice, especially in a world where much of the wider church is telling us it is unnecessary. Just take the instant diet pill and eat whatever you want. This is not a video game; there is no diet pill. Winning requires work and training. Winning requires us to actually *run*...