

#1798  
Cf. #519 #974 #1260

1 Corinthians 9:1-23<sup>1</sup>  
Christian freedom is no excuse  
for irresponsibility.  
22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Supplementary Lectionary  
Series "B," Epistles, adapted

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<sup>9:1</sup> Am I not free? Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our LORD? Are you not the result of my work in the LORD? <sup>2</sup> Even though I may not be an Apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you yourselves are the seal of my Apostleship in the LORD.

<sup>3</sup> This is my defense to those who are judging me. <sup>4</sup> Do we not have the right to food and drink? <sup>5</sup> Do we not have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other Apostles and the LORD's brothers and Cephas (that is, Peter)? <sup>6</sup> Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?

<sup>7</sup> Who ever serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? <sup>8</sup> Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Does not the Law say the same thing? <sup>9</sup> For it has been written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain" (Deuteronomy 25:4). Is it about oxen that God is concerned? <sup>10</sup> Surely he says this for us, does he not? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. <sup>11</sup> If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? <sup>12</sup> If others have this right of support from you, should not we have it all the more?

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with all things rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ. <sup>13</sup> Do you not know that those who work in the [pagan] temples get their food from the (pagan) temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? <sup>14</sup> In the same way, the LORD has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the Gospel.

<sup>15</sup> But I myself have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. <sup>16</sup> Yet when I preach the Gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! <sup>17</sup> If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. <sup>18</sup> What then is my reward? Just this: That in preaching the Gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

<sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

<sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the Gospel that I may share in its blessings.

ST. PAUL PROCLAIMS HIS FREEDOM  
I. FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY TO ANYONE  
II. FREEDOM IN SLAVERY TO CHRIST FOR EVERYONE

In the Name of Jesus, who has set us free from sin, death and hell, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

Our text this morning is from St. Paul's First Epistle or Letter to the Corinthians. The Corinthian congregation had many, many serious problems.

There were factions, divisions and disputes among the members of the congregation. Some claimed allegiance to St. Paul, others to Apollos, who had preached the Gospel to them. Others claimed allegiance to Peter. And, a really, really self-satisfied group claimed allegiance to Christ! St. Paul had to remind them that Christ was not divided and that they all were to be of one mind, one faith, and one confession.

Another problem among the Corinthian congregation was their toleration of sexual immorality. Corinth was a port city. As is the case with many port cities, there was sexual immorality. Corinth's reputation for its immorality was so great that if someone wanted to describe a sexually immoral society or culture, it was referred to as being "corinthianized." St. Paul made clear that those who engaged in sexual immorality as well as other sins, had no place in the Kingdom of God.

Another problem among the Corinthians was law disputes. Rather than settling their differences out of court, believers were taking potshots at each other in the law courts of Corinth. This gave Christianity a bad name.

There was an abuse of Christian freedom. St. Paul wrote "'Everything is permissible' – but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible – but not everything is constructive. No one should seek his own good, but the good of others'" (10:23&24). Instead, Corinthian Christians had the attitude that they could do what they wanted to do and it was nobody else's business.

St. Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed God's Word in truth and purity among the Corinthians, but the Corinthians had failed to learn from what Paul and Barnabas had taught them concerning the history of Israel in the Old Testament. The Corinthians were committing the same kinds of sins for which God had punished Old Testament Israel. Paul warned them, "I if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall!" (10:12).

There was among the Corinthians abuse of the LORD's Supper – Holy Communion. This sacrament was commonly celebrated among them at the end of their "agape" or love

meals. But there were problems. Rich people brought abundant food – for themselves; the poor had barely nothing, and the rich did not share their abundance. In addition, people were getting drunk and then coming to the LORD’s Table! In addition to that, there was no preparation for Holy Communion. People were not examining themselves – reviewing the Law that showed them their sin and their condemnation and reviewing what Christ had done for them to free them from condemnation and damnation.

There was pride and self-aggrandizement. There was abuse of God’s order of creation to the extent that women were putting themselves forward as leaders in the congregation and in congregational worship – an abuse that many denominations tolerate today.

There was something much worse – much worse yet understandable among all these other abuses. There was the denial that Jesus had risen from the dead! Along with that then, there was the denial that believers in Jesus would rise from the dead!

In all of these problems, the Corinthians lost sight of the central message that St. Paul and Barnabas had brought to them, when they did their missionary work among them. That central message St. Paul proclaimed to them at the beginning of this Epistle: “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2). Jesus Christ was crucified for sins and raised to life because all were justified freely by his grace.

In Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten of this First Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul addresses especially the abuse of Christian freedom. Thus, in our text this morning from Chapter Nine, ST. PAUL PROCLAIMS HIS FREEDOM. ST. PAUL PROCLAIMS HIS FREEDOM ... I. FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY TO ANYONE; and, yet, II. FREEDOM IN SLAVERY TO CHRIST FOR EVERYONE.

### ST. PAUL PROCLAIMS HIS FREEDOM I. FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY TO ANYONE

St. Paul and Barnabas brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Corinthians. In doing this, they did not receive any support from the Corinthians as they proclaimed God’s Word to them. What was worse, the Corinthians did not feel any obligation to support Paul and Barnabas. Yet the Corinthians did support others.

St. Paul states,

***<sup>3</sup> This is my defense to those who are judging me. <sup>4</sup> Do we not have the right to food and drink? <sup>5</sup> Do we not have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other Apostles and the LORD’s brothers and Cephas (that is, Peter)? <sup>6</sup> Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? (9:3-6).***

St. Paul and Barnabas were free to receive such support from the Corinthians, but the Corinthians offered no such support.

In dealing with this matter, St. Paul urges the Corinthians to use their common sense. He says,

***<sup>7</sup> Who ever serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? <sup>8</sup> Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Does not the Law say the same thing? <sup>9</sup> For it has been written in the Law of Moses: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” (Deuteronomy 25:4). Is it about oxen that God is concerned? <sup>10</sup> Surely he says this for us, does he not? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. <sup>11</sup> If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? <sup>12</sup> If others have this right of support from you, should not we have it all the more? (9:7-12).***

A soldier is paid for his soldiering. A grape grower receives an income from his work as does the sheep-herder. The plowman, planter and harvester earn a wage for their work. But the Corinthians did not offer to support Paul and Barnabas when Paul and Barnabas were proclaiming to them salvation and eternal life in Jesus! What arrogance! What selfishness! What irresponsibility! What blindness! But St. Paul goes on and illustrates his Christian freedom.

Paul goes on to say,

***<sup>12</sup> If others have this right of support from you, should not we have it all the more?***

***But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with all things rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ. <sup>13</sup> Do you not know that those who work in the [pagan] temples get their food from the (pagan) temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? <sup>14</sup> In the same way, the LORD has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the Gospel.***

***<sup>15</sup> But I myself have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast (9:12-15).***

Others received support from the Corinthians. Even the false prophets and rebels among the congregation received support from the Corinthians. Paul and Barnabas did not. But now Paul adds another dimension.

Paul states that he would not take advantage of any support from the Corinthians even if it were offered. The pagans in their pagan temples paid their pagan priests. This was common sense. St. Paul had a right to have the Corinthians support him. But he refused. He did not want anyone to think that he was getting rich from the congregation. The principle remained: “Those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the Gospel” (9:14). This was the LORD’s command. In Christian freedom, however, St. Paul did not take advantage of this right. What was St. Paul’s reasoning behind his decision?

The reason St. Paul did not use the right of having the Corinthians support his ministry of the Gospel among them, was that he did not want anything to stand in the way of that Gospel. In Christian freedom, Paul refused support, for he did not want anyone to think he was getting rich from the congregation.

#### APPROPRIATION

In Christ Jesus, you and I are also free, and we are in slavery to no one. No one has the right to demand a certain amount of money from you for the support of this congregation or its pastor or staff. No one has the right to demand from you that you spend a certain amount of time or talent at work in this congregation. The congregation does not have that right; the synod does not have that right. Suggestions and recommendations can be made and are made, but they are only suggestions. At the same time, as believers in Jesus, St. Paul is warning you and me not to abuse our Christian freedom.

You heard St. Paul speak of the abuse of Christian freedom earlier when he said, “‘Everything is permissible’ – but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible – but not everything is constructive. No one should seek his own good, but the good of others’” (10:23&24). It was in seeking the good of others that the Christian would refuse to use his Christian freedom in certain circumstances. At the same time, every Christian was to recognize that he or she was a slave to Christ for the benefit of everyone. Thus, we see that

#### ST. PAUL PROCLAIMS HIS FREEDOM II. FREEDOM IN SLAVERY TO CHRIST FOR EVERYONE

St. Paul makes the point that even though he is free and under obligation to no one, nevertheless he makes himself a slave for the sake of Christ. He says,

***<sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the Gospel that I may share in its blessings (9:19-23).***

It was for the sake of the Gospel – for the sake of God’s Word in truth and purity – that St. Paul gave up his Christian freedom and became a slave of Christ Jesus for the benefit of others.

When St. Paul was dealing with the Jews, he behaved as a Jew. Indeed, St. Paul was of Jewish descent, from the tribe of Benjamin. When Paul was proclaiming God’s Word to

the Jews, he would go along with their dietary restrictions and their gathering together on the Sabbath – on Saturday – as long as they did not insist that it was a sin not to gather on other days or a sin to eat things that the Old Testament Law had prohibited. Those Old Testament Laws were done away with by Christ's perfect fulfillment of all the Law.

When St. Paul was proclaiming God's Word among Gentiles, he would join them in worship when and where they had determined and did not follow Old Testament dietary laws. St. Paul remained flexible on such matters, given with whom he was dealing. Of course, St. Paul was not at all flexible in his proclamation of God's Word in truth and purity. Why did St. Paul place himself as a slave under Christ Jesus for the benefit of those to whom he was bringing God's Word?

St. Paul was not paid or reimbursed for his ministry of God's Word. He describes that ministry as a trust given to him by Christ Jesus.

***<sup>16</sup> Yet when I preach the Gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! <sup>17</sup> If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. <sup>18</sup> What then is my reward? Just this: That in preaching the Gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it (9:16-18).***

Paul's reasoning is this: If he preached the Word of God voluntarily – as if someone hired to do so – then he would have been owed a wage or reward. But St. Paul states that he was compelled to preach the Word. Woe to St. Paul if he did not preach the Word! For St. Paul had been given the charge, assignment, trust by Christ to preach the Word. Paul describes this trust in some detail in his Epistle to the Ephesians.

To the Ephesians, St. Paul wrote,

***<sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the Mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the Mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy Apostles and Prophets. <sup>6</sup> This Mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of One Body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.***

***<sup>7</sup> I became a Servant of this Gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: To preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this Mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, <sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose***

***which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our LORD. <sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence*** (Ephesians 3:2-12).

St. Paul was a steward, a manager, an ambassador under Christ Jesus. His work was to preach God's Word; his work was to point to Jesus as the Savior of all people; his work and joy was to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus – the Good News that Jesus had taken away the sins of the world and that by faith alone in Jesus a person had eternal life and salvation. Yes, in his preaching, St. Paul also used the Law – as he did throughout this Epistle to the Corinthians, calling to their attention their shameful sinfulness. But St. Paul emphasized the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins to all. Thus, St. Paul made himself a slave of Christ Jesus for the benefit of all.

#### APPLICATION

St. Paul did not abuse his Christian freedom, neither should we. Christian freedom is not an excuse for license to satisfy our sinful nature. St. Paul commented about that in this Epistle. Other writers of the Scriptures also commented about such things.

Jude writes in his short Epistle,

***<sup>3</sup> Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. <sup>4</sup> For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and LORD*** (Jude 3&4).

The Apostle Peter also wrote about those who used Christian freedom as a license for sinful behavior. Peter said,

***<sup>9</sup> ... the LORD knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. <sup>10</sup> This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority*** (2 Peter 2:9b&10a).

Jude, Paul, Peter, and the other holy writers, inspired by God the Holy Spirit, warned about greed, envy, jealousy, slander, self-righteousness, pride as well as sexual immorality. They warned about failure to hear God's Word. They warned that where there was no repentance, there was also no forgiveness; and, where there was no forgiveness, there was only eternal condemnation in hell. But believers – you and I as believers in Jesus – have the glorious freedom in Christ to be slaves of Christ.

You and I are slaves to Christ. In the first place, Jesus owns us. Jesus bought and paid for us on the cross with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. Jesus is our Redeemer. Jesus paid the redemption price of his life for us. Secondly, what a wonderful slavery you and I have in Jesus!

Think of what our master, owner, Redeemer Jesus does for us. He daily provides for all of our needs. He who fed the five thousand and later the four thousand with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, certainly provides for our daily needs. Jesus, our master, owner, Redeemer, protects us. He has promised to be with us always and never to leave us or forsake us; and, he also sends his holy angels to protect us. Jesus, our master, owner, and Redeemer, reminds us daily in his Word that in him alone we have forgiveness of sins. He gives us this assurance in his Word, which is why we will not hesitate to be in his Word every day. Jesus our master, owner and Redeemer, gives us his Gospel – the Gospel of the full and free forgiveness of sins he earned for us on the cross. It is in our slavery to Jesus, then, that we seek the good of others – their spiritual good.

You and I have the opportunity to proclaim the wonders of God to others. We have the opportunity to remind family and relatives of what Jesus has done for them. We have the responsibility to tell neighbor and co-worker about Jesus. We have indeed through our pastor and our synod, through our prayers and thankofferings, to hear, learn and support the work of the proclamation of the Gospel among ourselves and others. To be a slave of our LORD Jesus Christ is a wonderful freedom that Jesus has given to us when he brought us to faith in him as our Savior.

## CONCLUSION

The Corinthian congregation had many, many problems. Those problems arose when they lost sight of the central message of the Scriptures: Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins. We too are tempted to lose sight of that message.

There are many things about which we can be concerned here in our church of Grace Lutheran Church, Durand, Michigan. There are many things about which we can be concerned in our daily lives. But by bringing back into central focus that central message of Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen for the forgiveness of our sins, those other matters will be placed into their proper perspective. In addition, with the message of the Gospel of Jesus as central, you and I will have a proper understanding of the use of our Christian freedom.

We will not abuse our Christian freedom but, rather, put the needs of others in first place. And, the greatest need of others is to hear the saving Gospel of our LORD Jesus – a Gospel which has saved us and a Gospel that will save them. Amen.