

The Living Gospel Pt 9

1 Corinthians 8-9

May 7, 2017 - Spence Shelton

Whatever it takes – Taking the gospel to your church family, your old high school friends, and complete strangers in far away lands. | 1 Corinthians 8-9

Hey little PSA – Next weekend is Mothers day. So please make plans to appreciate the mothers in your life. Call them, send them flowers, make them feel special. Related: Quick reminder about our parenting workshop on the 20th. You'll want to sign up now for that. Our guest speaker for that is Pastor Will Toburen who has pastored me in this area. He'll do the opening session and then he'll hold a breakout specifically for parents of middle & high school students. I will be leading the breakout for parents of elementary and pre-school aged kids. Should be an awesome time.

Intro

Ok if you are new with us welcome. Great time to come in we are walking through a book in the New Testament called 1st Corinthians. Gospels, Acts, Romans, 1st Corinthians. The main idea Paul has said throughout is we all see the world through a certain point of view and Paul is challenging us to see every part of life from what we are

calling a gospel point of view. To look at family, friendship, marriage, singleness, everything through gospel lenses and direct our actions based on what the gospel tells us to be true about that area of life.

Today I have the privilege of sharing with you the heartbeat of Mercy Church. I feel like it couldn't come at a better time. As Easter is still in our rear view, as God has brought new faces into our church, I get to bring to you today one of the passages of scripture that speaks directly to who we long to be as a church. If we were your grandma's couch, this would be the bible verse stitched on one of our pillows. If we were your cool hipster friend's forearm, this would be our Greek tattoo. Know what I'm saying?

Here's the gist: Paul is on an urgent mission to tell as many people as he can in the known world about the love of Christ available to them. And in order to accomplish that mission...he is willing to do whatever it takes. That's a big idea today Mercy Family. **Whatever it takes.** 2 really: preeminence of Christ & whatever it takes to point people to him. **Are we willing to give whatever it takes & to give up whatever it takes in order to proclaim the gospel to others?**

What Paul is going to show us today is this mission was so paramount that it shaped how believers were to act with believers inside the church (Chapter 8) AND how they were to interact with unbelievers in their community (Chapter 9). I believe there is A LOT here for us that all works

together. So let me start with the main idea, with this mission, and then show you how he lived it out among everyone he knew.

Here's Paul's Mission:

I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. [23] I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. 1 Corinthians 9.22b - 23

For 2 chapters Paul says he adjusts his life all the time to help people see Jesus. And this is the motivation for everything he does: ***I do it all for the sake of the gospel.*** Do you see that?

Paul's #1 life driving agenda is the proclamation of the gospel. This was the one thing he built everything around. Everything else is optional to Paul. Courtney and I went on a date the other night to blaze pizza. It's like Chipotle for pizza. You walk along the line and they custom make it. That way, you get lots of options. (And btw if you are looking for a \$20 date night...look no further). I wanted all the meats. Courtney wanted just pepperoni. Worked because it's all optional. Almost. You have to have a crust. They have different kinds but Crust is NOT optional on pizza. That's the gospel for Paul. It's the only non-optional thing about his life. The rest of his life is toppings. His decisions are made based around whether or not whatever he is considering will help him proclaim the gospel. And

he's willing to do whatever it takes to keep preaching the gospel to people!

And he's telling the Corinthians this because he is calling them to follow in his footsteps. And because Paul never tells you the what without the WHY, he tells them it's all about Jesus! So here's my question. And this one is to Christians. If you aren't a Christian you get a pass for a minute.

Most of us want to say what Paul says. We get in here and it feels like an awesome rallying cry "YEAH! EVERYTHING FOR JESUS!" But, then the rest of our week kind of wraps around our feet like mud and real quick we find ourselves **saying** "all for Jesus" but **living** "all for Jesus AND...my family....and....my career....and....my friends....and...my future." Life becomes "for the sake of the gospel" **AND** other things too. And though most of us would never say it here's what happens:

- What started in our faith as "ONLY JESUS"
- But somehow reality set in and we Became: "Jesus AND"
- And when we live a little while with our priorities as Jesus AND, before we know it there is a subtle shift over to "AND Jesus". Or "Jesus when it doesn't get in the way of anything." And before we know it, the gospel that was of first importance when we became a believer is now something we get to occasionally or when we have time. Again we'd never say it but

maybe you've drifted in your heart and life from Only Jesus to And Jesus.

Paul's cry...cutting through all the excuses and everything is for the Corinthians to join him in fighting for ONLY JESUS lives.

So my question to us is...what keeps you from an Only Jesus mindset? Most likely it is a good thing God has blessed you with that you have let jump into the #1 slot in your heart and mind. Your children's future or your financial stability. Both good things to care about, but have they become competitors with Jesus for what drives your decision making? You will never have the joy or freedom that comes with Christ when you live an "And Jesus" life. He is either first and over all or he isn't your God.

Non-Christians check back in. Paul says he does ALL THINGS for the sake of the gospel. That drives every action he takes. It's not about himself, it's about Jesus and others encountering Jesus through his words and actions. And he will do whatever it takes for others to hear the good news of Jesus. **That's the heartbeat of Mercy Church.** Our heartbeat is "Only Jesus." Only Jesus will save you, only he will satisfy those cravings in your soul for meaning. For self-worth. And if you hear nothing else today, hear this: You were created by God to worship him only and he has given you one means by which you can know him. And his name is Jesus. That's what we are all about here and we are going to do whatever it takes for you and the rest of the

people in Charlotte to hear that message. Everything else in life is toppings. Jesus taking on your sin and redeeming your life...that is everything to us.

Ok, now I want us to see how that played itself out for Paul. The gospel being his heartbeat creates a certain way of approaching the world. Now let me show you what an "only Jesus" heartbeat creates in Paul and I believe what it should create in each of us:

First, let's look at chapter 8. Chapter 8 opens like this:

[1] Now concerning food offered to idols...

The next 3 chapters, 8-10, are going to circle around this food sacrificed to idols idea. This is a question he got in a letter. So here he goes: Corinth, as many places in the empire, had many temples.¹ It was common social etiquette to have meals in temples in Corinth and this posed a real problem for new converts to Christianity. Sacrifices and social gatherings often went in tandem, so to cut oneself off from that meant cutting social ties. Business, leisure, birthday parties, and networking were all done in and around Temple worship and/or dining in its halls.² Also, meat that was not used or eaten by the priest or worshipper at the Temple was usually sold in the local

¹ Barnett, *1 Corinthians: Focus on the Bible Series* (2004), 135; Thiselton *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC: 2000), 618-9.

² Barnett, *1 Corinthians*, 135; Morris, 122

shops and markets at Corinth. So you wouldn't know if you were eating meat dedicated at a temple or not if bought local. Farm to table sometimes took a detour to the temple. Some Christians though thought what was the harm, since idols were harmless blocks of wood you ate in front of. So Paul addresses the question can we eat meat sacrificed to idols?³

: We know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. (ESV)

Paul is reminding them of the first 4 chapters of this letter. Theological knowledge puffs us out like a balloon. We are proud but empty when it comes to what matters. Love on the other hand builds us and others up like a building. It is filling and lasting. Not empty hot air. Then Paul says:

[2] If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. (ESV)

The true measure of knowing God isn't knowing him intellectually its knowing him relationally. Which means

³ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 122-3; Thiselton *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC: 2000), 617. Thiselton, drawing on other commentator and the social context, believes the word 'eidolothuta' should therefore be translated 'food dedicated to idols', since this covers meat eaten both inside the Temple and that found in the marketplace.

you know him and he knows you. Huge problem in Corinthian church and ours. Knowing about God does not make you a disciple. Knowing God & God knowing you, that relationship is everything. And that relationship...that creates love for God and for others. Watch.

[4] Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one."

Paul says you people with knowledge are right. The idols have no power. They are a block of wood. And so meat sacrificed to them is in fact OK to eat because nothing has happened to the meat and you will not be cursed if you eat it because those gods don't actually have power. So you are FREE to eat the meat. BUT

[7] However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

There were some believers who had a history with pagan idols. It was a big part of their former way of life. And if they eat that same meat...it will confuse and damage their new faith because they associate that action with their former way of life. And at this moment eating that meat would be, in their hearts, an act of worship to former gods. Something they had repented of. So Paul says

[8] Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

He's saying...it's not like food makes us holy. Meat is not going to hurt or help us in our closeness with God. Basically...eating meat is a freedom that is just a preference, just a topping, and nothing more. Then he says

[9] **But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.** [10] For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? [11] And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. [12] Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Paul asks the 'strong' that if they are seen eating in these places, will the 'weak' not also be emboldened (literally built up into, see v. 8:1) to eat food offered to idols, returning to their pagan practices? They would reason- 'they have knowledge, they are strong, I can do this too!' When in fact, their conscience will condemn them and they will fall. The 'strong', seeking to build them up in their knowledge and faith through eating this meat actually build them up the wrong way and destroy them.⁴

⁴ Morris, 127; Barnett, *1 Corinthians*, 144; Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 651-3.

It will be a sin for you to enjoy your freedom at the expense of a brother's faith. So Paul says it really bluntly in verse 13: [13] **Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.** (ESV)

Here's the first thing Paul's "Only Jesus" heartbeat created in him:

1. Gospel humility: Paul surrenders his freedoms to serve his church family

Catch this guys. Paul understood he was free from this fear of meat sacrificed to idols. The gospel gave him that freedom. BUT and this is everything...the gospel also created love for his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Instead of trying to convince weak brothers to eat like he eats, he says you know...that's not a big deal. Food doesn't make us better or worse. So I'll restrict my lifestyle for the sake of my brothers. You see that "whatever it takes" attitude coming out.

So the question is: What are our meats today? I could list off plenty but the point is, whatever your context...look at those freedoms that could confuse and even harm your brother's faith and pray hard about surrendering them. Here's one example:

Alcohol – I believe as I look through scripture that a Christian is free in Christ to consume alcohol. I do. That said, chapter 8 applies – while it isn't inherently evil, it does

not commend us to God. So are you free to drink? (*Not to get drunk. That's very clear in Eph 5. Believers are to allow the spirit, not a substance, to control their actions. Some of you need to consider whether you get more excited about the way a drink tastes or the way it makes you feel. But, again that's not the point today. The point today is love for other brothers and sisters.*) So are you free to drink? I think each person has to prayerfully weigh this out. That's what Paul did. If there were people around him whose faith would be confused & ultimately harmed by seeing him eating meat that had been sacrificed...he said he wouldn't eat it. So whether it's alcohol or something else pray through chapter 8 here with the heartbeat that says "**Only Jesus.**" Whatever it takes from me so that you only see Jesus.

It's not a law question. It's a context and love question. If need be, are you willing to submit your freedom to serve your church family member who may be weaker in their faith right now?

Ok let's move into chapter 9 so I can show you how Paul's "Only Jesus" heartbeat enables him to share the gospel with non-Christians. I'm starting in verse 19 because the rest of chapter 9 is Paul reinforcing "hey I will endure *whatever it takes* so that I can preach the gospel to you guys." Then he moves to talking about non Christians and says

[19] For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. That's him summarizing chapters 8-9. I'm free in Christ. But I'm also a

servant like Christ. So that I might be used by Christ to win over people to Christ. [20] To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 1 Cor 9.19-20

Paul is Jewish. So to say he became "as a Jew" is a pretty odd thing to say. That'd be like me saying, "To the star wars nerds I became as a star wars nerd." Let's just say I don't have to try that hard. So what is Paul talking about?

Verses 19 – 23 are, in many ways, Missionary Training 101. Paul is going to say I became as a Jew to Jews and as a gentile to the gentiles. This adapting to the culture he is in is what Missionary Training courses call contextualization. To contextualize is to learn about the people in a certain context (for example: charlotte). You learn about their history, about their customs, and about their shared hopes and fears. What common stories run through that context? And then...you work to speak the gospel in a way that speaks to people in that context. And the amazing thing...is that the gospel will speak right to the heart of whatever context you are in. That's because the gospel is the true story that all other stories find their resolution in. Paul knows this. And because his heart is gripped that he wants others to know this...he sees the only thing stopping others from believing it is hearing it. And for them to hear it he has to go tell them. And to do that in a way that honors and respects them, he has to become "as" one of them.

This is why I've been caught fishing in a cardigan with a latte beside me. I have two people God has called me to preach the gospel to. City People & Country Folk. That's my marriage. City boy & country girl. Every Family event is a blending of those two worlds. That's just God writing my story. I think that's why God placed me in Charlotte. Plenty of both. And my job is to show how the gospel speaks to both.

Quick Aside: This is huge for how some non-Christians here may view Christian missionaries. Paul is not trying to CHANGE a CULTURE. Paul is trying to introduce Jesus into the culture. Christians certainly haven't been perfect throughout history. The crusades and some missionary work in Africa sought to "civilize barbaric peoples" which meant changing their culture. But the gospel is true for all cultures because God created all people. So the job of Christians is to learn and respect the culture they go to and seek to communicate the gospel in their language.

Now because our full identity is a Christ follower, our primary identity will never change even when our context does change. We are always Christians. That's our first family. Whether I'm with country or city folk. Whether Paul is with Jews or Greeks. In fact St. Augustine, in the early 5th century, wrote a book called City of God where he said Christians have dual citizenship. FIRST is in God's kingdom, second is earthly citizenship. So even when we move about on earth, we never lose our primary identity in the gospel.

So then vv 19-23 Paul shows us the driving motivation for his behavior among the two main contexts he gave his life to reaching with the gospel.

First the one we just read. The Jews. Fascinatingly Paul is talking about going back to the people he belonged to before becoming a Christian. Which means he already knows their language, their history, their customs, their hopes and fears. And he sees now what a blessing that is! PAUL has credibility with them, as one of them, that gentile Christians never would. But his primary citizenship isn't with them anymore. It's with Christ. So he can return to them "as" one of them while not being fully one of them. Catch that? The power of the gospel has so transformed him that he is returning to his context as a missionary to reach others with the gospel.

For most of us, when we become Christians, this is the first "context" God sends us to. To the people we belonged to already. Maybe you are the first of your friend group to become a Christian. Our identity in Christ gives us the security to introduce our friends to the gospel. I told you there were 3 things Paul's "only Jesus" mantra gives us. Here's the second

Gospel security: Paul retains his new identity while reaching his old community

College student listen, some of you are going home for summer. And I've seen many students watch their new faith melt away in the summer heat of old friends and family. This summer...and always...we begin the day with "Only Jesus." "Jesus and" just wont work. You need to get desperate for Jesus this summer. And you need to see yourself not as one merely trying to "hold on" to your faith, but as one God has commissioned with the gospel to win your old friends to Christ. You see that? You are now, as a Christian, a missionary to your old community. So go back home. But go with the security the gospel gives you that empowers you to reach your old community. The gospel gives you that confidence yes, but it also gives you something else: **humility**.

Paul didn't think he was better than them now that he had Jesus. He didn't drift back into their lifestyle nor did he lord his new faith over them. He adapted where he could and told them how the gospel fulfilled their hopes and answered their fears. He explained the gospel in a way that made sense to them.

The other group God sent Paul to in his life was gentiles. Those who were not under Jewish law to begin with. Paul says

[21] To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.

Here Paul talks about how he adapted to an entirely new culture. Gentiles had far fewer religious laws than the Jewish community he came out of. Notice what he says though: He didn't go outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ. So his moral code didn't vanish when he entered this new context. He was still submitting his ethics, his behavior, to Jesus. This is big y'all. He wasn't two totally different people. **He was one guy living an ONLY JESUS life and adapting where he could to the context he was in at the time.** And God empowered him to speak the gospel in this new culture. This is the 3rd thing his "only Jesus" lifestyle gave him:

Gospel fluency: Paul adjusts to a new culture to reach a new people group.

Paul learned about a new people. Their history, their customs, their hopes & fears. Where they found security. Then spoke truth into that.

Acts 17 is the perfect companion study to this passage. Paul is in Athens and he sees idols everywhere. Very much a pluralistic context like ours here in charlotte. In the same chapter he reasons with Jews in the synagogue, then goes over to the Areopagus and reasons with epicurean philosophers. Two totally different groups. Paul comfortable in both. Why? Because the gospel answers both! To one he says, "The messiah your scriptures talked about is Jesus!" to the other he says "The unknown god you

have an idol for...I know the identity! It's the one true God. His name is Jesus!"

Here's the thing: There are people groups around the world that need to hear this gospel. They've never heard it. And maybe you think, "how could I ever do that!?" And today what you are seeing is that all you need is Jesus. Only Jesus. God will blow you away when you watch how this gospel will speak right to the heart of a person so different from you. And that's because even though you are different, you were made by the same creator who has placed the same need for the one true God into both of your hearts.

Let me close with Paul's closing metaphor. Paul says

[24] Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. [25] Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. [26] So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. [27] But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

We have such a great prize. Something much greater than a garland of roses. Our prize is God himself. We get God. And those we introduce to Christ...get God also. So we discipline ourselves, like Paul to live for one thing...ONLY JESUS. We don't live random, purposeless lives. Everything we do has

a purpose...Only Jesus! Are you bringing everything in your life under that purpose?

Non-Christian, let me close out talking to you. The gospel tells your story too. You were meant to know the one true God. To worship him. To flourish under his design. But that's not you right now. What are your hopes & dreams?

Watched Willy Wonka last night and the last line of the movie Wonka tells Charlie "Don't forget what happened to the man who got everything he ever wanted...he lived happily ever after." Well on the surface that's just dumb right. Nice house, good job, good family, more bills, more stress, more relationships to manage. Mo money mo problems. There is no happily ever after here on earth.

But in a deeper sense Wonka was on to something. Our soul is longing for peace, for security, for joy & fulfillment. But we wont find it in chocolate. Believe me I've tried. We find it in one place...in Christ. Because you were created to find it there. Will you consider Christ? He's what your soul has always wanted. And today he's calling you. Give your life to him.