

Share the Gospel Blessings

✦ **Servant to no one (vv.16-19)**

✦ **Servant to everyone (vv.19-23)**

In the name of Jesus, the soul's best Friend, dearly redeemed saints of God:

Why do we do what we do? All wrapped up in work and family, plus a little fun now and then. But what is the driving force in your life? Focus on fun and lose it in an accident, like "Superman," Christopher Reeves, paralyzed falling from a horse. Work? Great! Before the pink slip. Family? Super! 'Til Christmas morning for a friend of mine whose wife said she doesn't love him anymore. Why?

A veteran home mission pastor, Pacific Northwest, early 1970's, was excited about a name on his prospect list. Where 90% are unchurched and proud of it, a young man from our WELS schools might be an active member, maybe Evangelism chairman. What a shock: "Yeh, Pastor, about that. I moved out here like everybody else for fishing and skiing. You'll see me in church now and then, but beyond that – no can do." Why? A boy my age in our congregation drowned in a fishing accident off the Oregon coast. My dad had to identify the body. Skiing? Six kids in my seventh grade class had broken legs from skiing accidents one Christmas. No one seems to notice life is short. What will we do in the end?

The Lord's Apostle Paul was different. We have a few verses from a whole chapter about the driving force in Paul's life. Everything was wrapped up in one goal: **Share the Gospel Blessings.**

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Take the first half of our middle verse and think back: *"Though I am free and belong to no man...."* Last week's sermon on 1 Corinthians 8, showed Christian freedom should not cause someone to sin against his conscience. Paul concluded: *"If what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall."* (8:13 NIV84) Give up steak? For a brother, yes!

In fact, Paul was willing to give up far more. As American Christians we get irritated by our entitlement culture, but how can we not be affected? You can't walk across a muddy barnyard and keep your boots clean. We pick up soul crud from our culture all the time. We need the Holy Spirit to help us be different from Americans who worship their work, work at their play and play at their worship.

Here's what Paul means by **Servant to no one**. Like Peter and the rest, Paul had apostolic rights to financial support and female companionship from a faithful wife. It still amazes me that Peter, the man Rome claims as their first Pope, is said here *"to take along a believing wife."* (9:5) Paul asserts all this is right by the Lord who commanded *"that those who preach the gospel should make their living from the gospel."* (9:14) Moses' law said, *"Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain"* (9:9; Deuteronomy 25:4), which Paul applies to pastors. Soldiers get paid. Vintners eat grapes from their own arbors. And ranchers should make a profit too. It's God's way. It's a workman's right.

Yet, Paul voluntarily gave up his rights. He was a "Happy Single," as our Christians in Wuhan, China, call them. Paul chose not to assert his right to financial support because he wanted a special way to give thanks to God for mercies beyond measure. You see, Paul had been a violent persecutor of Christians. But when Christ converted him, the Lord gave Paul a special commission: Missionary to the Gentiles. That's why Paul could not boast about preaching the Gospel. *"I am compelled to preach. I have no choice. If I preach only because I must, I'm just doing my duty. But if I preach out of pure desire, I have a special reward: the joy of Jesus, spreading this Good News free of charge. It's a way to give thanks to God. I'd rather die than have anyone take away this boast."*

That's why Paul claimed to be **Servant to no one**. His independence meant he could preach Christ without worrying who paid the bills or might be offended. Someone told me not long ago that's why Martin Luther took up woodworking as a hobby. I've not seen any evidence of this, but the comment is interesting. Luther felt pastors should have a trade just in case no one wants to listen to the Gospel. Even though we're insulated somewhat from the collection plate by our budgets in WELS congregations, it's still good to remember that our pastors are first, last and always servants of Christ, answerable to Him in the end. Scary, yet comforting – as when Jesus says in Revelation (1:20; 2:1) that He holds the seven stars, the pastors of the seven churches, in His right hand.

✠ **Servant to everyone (vv.19-23)**

Don't you love these Biblical paradoxes? **Servant to no one** – yet – **Servant to everyone**. How does that work? Voluntarily, of course. Paul is loving God first, neighbor second, self last. *“I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 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. 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. 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. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”*

Working with Jews, Paul obeyed Moses' law, eating Kosher like his fellow Jews. With Gentiles, non-Jews not under Moses' law, Paul kept “Christ's law” by loving the way the Ten Commandments show us – God and neighbor. But Paul did not worry about dietary laws, etc. Like our own missionaries the world over, if snails are served, don't ask, just eat. Flies caught in nets along Lake Malawi? Great delicacy! Enjoy it! In Wuhan, 2005, I thought my lotus soup had hair in it. Don't worry, just eat. Finally they told me it's a local tradition: *Once you've been in Wuhan, like the silk hairs of the lotus soup, you're always connected.* Have a sense of humor. After they learned we were telling American jokes laughing at ourselves, they started sharing Chinese jokes. **Servant to everyone** – except self.

One of the greatest things I love about the Gospel is its multiplying force. Dr. Becker told us at Seminary, “I'm never so sure about my own salvation as when I'm preaching to others.” The more you share God's love and forgiveness in Christ, the more you **Share the Gospel Blessings**. That alone should help us not give up. Think salesman's statistics: 80% of all sales are made after the fifth call. 48% of all salesmen make one call and quit; 25% – two calls and quit; 12% make three calls and quit. That leaves only 15% who keep on calling, they make 80% of all sales.¹ And we're giving the Gospel for free.

Chris Driesbach has it right in his song: “Christ would have died for you alone To change your heart of stone.” For only you, Christ would have come. Just to win your heart, He loves 100%. So you'll understand why God does not want us to give up on friends, relatives, associates and neighbors.

Remember the boy and the starfish? Walking on a beach one morning a man asked why the boy kept throwing starfish into the sea. “They'll die in the sun.” “But look, kid, there's thousands of them! It won't make a difference.” The boy stooped down, picked up another, smiled and threw it into the waves. “Made a difference for that one,” he said. Later the man came back to throw starfish along with him.

We can't reach all the souls around us. But we can quit asking about those who have not heard. If you know one, tell one. It will make a difference for that soul. God says His Word will not return empty. It will accomplish His purpose. The hard heart will either soften to faith, or lose all excuses come the Judgment Day. But for you, each time you tell of God's great love for others, that love comes back to you. Go ahead, point the Gospel finger. Christ died for you because Christ died for all. Just look when you point. Three fingers are pointing back at you. And it's thumbs up to God. Amen.

¹ Based on Rein, R.C. *Treasury of Themes and Illustrations*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1983, ref., 1048.