

The Cross-Shaped Missionary

intro

When It comes to skill training, whats most important, beyond being coached, or reading about basketball, or just practicing all the time,

And this is the same for us when it comes to living as missionaries (which by the way, every christian is). we need someone to show us how its done.

This morning we are going to look at 1 Cor. 9 and examine the life of the the apostle Paul. If you are just joining us or here last week... he has just been getting on the Corinthians for not walking in love toward one another, they were standing on their own rights and destroying each other. And now he's going to flip the script and show them how he does it.

and pull out three ways that we are to imitate him in how he lives on mission. We are to serve others by giving them the gospel, we are to do it by adapting our lives to their context, and third, in our pursuit of mission we must also pursue personal holiness.

1. Serve others by giving them the gospel

We are going to jump into this chapter right in the middle of it, v. 19,

19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

This is a phrase that Paul uses, giving us a glimpse into the inner workings of his heart and mind, helping us to understand what drives him and why he acts the way he does.

This has two parts to it that we are going to look at.

The first is that the christian must take the posture of a servant towards others.

Paul unashamedly has taken the posture of a servant. This was part of his core identity, the way he saw himself in relationship to others, and how he viewed his role in ministry.

Back in chapter 1 Paul is responding to the Corinthians who were lifting up different leaders, and Paul says what's the difference, following Paul or following Apollos, we are merely servants through whom the message comes. Then in chapter 4:1, he says this, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Then in 2 Cor. 4 "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."

This is the big picture for Paul. He is a servant of others. He exists for others. It's like in Phil 2 when he is contemplating going and being with Christ, he says he'd rather stay for their sake.

Every morning when Paul got up he put on his apron and picked up his towel. That was his uniform. A servant.

So what is a servant? A servant is one who gives up his rights for the good of another. One bible scholar says in describing a servant, "*It is not his own advantage, or even his desires and inclinations, but those of his hearers that govern his actions.*"

So the servant considers others needs as more significant than his own, and seeks to meet those needs.

Now, then the question is forced upon us. If we are servants of others, which means we exist for other's, we have to ask, what is most beneficial for others? Or, to put another way, what is others's greatest need?

The Bible is abundantly clear on this issue. Everyone is in desperately in need of Jesus.

Why? Because in the beginning was God, and God created man and woman to be in relationship with Him, and they were, in perfect love, peace, and joy. But Adam and Eve sinned, they disobeyed God, and they were judged and kicked out of God's presence.

And from that time all humanity has been born into sin, born with corrupt desires, inclinations and affections that are against God and against His commands. And it's appointed that each of us will one day stand before God and be judged according to righteousness.

Now, some people hope that their good will outweigh the bad, but the problem with that is when you stand before God the standard that you're judged upon is the perfection of His holiness.

That leaves humanity in a hopeless situation. But there in comes the gospel.

You see God has made a way where there was no way, by sending His perfect Son for us.

“21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”

This is the good news of the gospel. That God has sent His son to die for sinners and redeem all of humanity.

This now influences Paul's whole direction in life. He's thinking, I'm a servant of others, and if can do anything for them, it's to get them the gospel.

“I have made myself a servant to all, that (purpose statement) I might win more of them. That means winning them to Christ. Getting the gospel into their hearts.

There is nothing more weighty, more solemn to talk about, and probably the least fun thing to talk about, but also the most important. And that is, the eternal every soul, that leads to everlasting death or everlasting life, everlasting pain or everlasting joy, everlasting condemnation or everlasting acceptance, everlasting isolation or everlasting community, everlasting darkness or everlasting light.

And church, we have believed in this Jesus, and we now have the message of the gospel, that needs to get in the ears and hearts of every soul on planet earth.

John Piper says this about our evangelism, “If this is a minor part of your thought world, if you don't think about this very much, then it will be hard for you to feel the sense of sorrow and urgency that Paul felt for the lost people around him. What we need to do is ponder the wrath of God that is coming—to meditate, think about, reflect on, mull over, turn over in our minds, and dwell on—the reality of the wrath of God. Until this figures as largely in our worldview as it did for Paul, we will not have the passion for evangelism that he had.”

And I would add, we need to ponder the blessing of Christ—to meditate, think about, reflect on, mull over, turn over in our minds, and dwell on—the pleasure and satisfaction of Christ. We are calling people away from wrath but to God.

Do we believe in this. Because until we do, evangelism is silly and a waste of time. But when we do believe it, it give purpose and focus to everything we do.

And now is where I want to turn to the question of how we accomplish this. Okay, so i'm to take the posture of a servant and give people the gospel, but how is it best to do that?

2. Give them the gospel by adapting to their context

Now we are going to turn to Paul's application of this for the Corinthians, let's go back to the beginning of the chapter. I'm gonna read 1-18, it's a lot, but it's making one point, that Paul is adapting his life to their context in order to get them saved.

The Corinthians have been accusing Paul of not having authority and drawing into question his apostleship, at least partly, because Paul didn't receive money from them. In that day people equated a teacher's worth with how much money they had to pay him.

9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? 7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

8 Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 10 Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. 11 If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

There it is right there, he let go of a right, he adapted to their context in order not to put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

13 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? 14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. 16 For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

We don't know exactly why he let go of this right, maybe he didn't want the Corinthians thinking he was doing it for money, or maybe it was because he wanted them to understand the free gospel, or maybe as we learn in 2 cor he didn't want to be a burden to them. In any case, he's defending his right for compensation and then he's telling them that he willingly let go of this right precisely because he believed receiving money got in the way of them receiving the gospel.

Wisdom in serving them the gospel demanded that Paul abstain from a clear right that he had.

And listen, this isn't a light thing, this would have caused Paul an immense amount of time and labor and toil. He would have to get a job to support himself.

Which then leads Paul to zoom out and give us his greater missionary principle.

19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 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. 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. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. (And here it is, his big summary) I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings."

What is going on with Paul? Is he having an identity crises? Can he not figure out who he is? In fact he may be responding to those who actually were questioning his authority based upon this fact, they saw him keep flip flopping back and forth between different principles. I mean, doesn't this guy believe in anything? NC/UNC

No, Paul is not a middle-schooler who becomes someone new every week cause he's trying to find out who he is and fit in. No, Paul knows exactly who he is, he's a Christian, and who he is in Christ transcends cultural barriers. Paul is neither a Christian Jew or a Christian Gentile. He's becomes as DA Carson says, a third type of person.

So what drives this chameleon-like behavior? people hearing the gospel ... he needs to preach the gospel to all nations, but all nations are very different, (just like we meet very different people, all around us). and if he's not careful, something he may do may jeopardize his chances to share the gospel with others.

To the Jews he became as a Jew. If he does not do those types of things in the ceremonial law, he will never get a Jewish audience. They would kick him out. To the Gentiles he became a Gentile. He let go of his Jewish identity (but not his Christian identity), and unnecessary cultural boundaries. But still under demands placed upon him by Christ. To the weak he became like the weak (8:13). This is likely referring back to the previous discussion about those who have a weak consciences, not eating meat if someone else doesn't think they should eat meat.

He "became all things to all people." for gospel, And this is what we need to do, but we need to clarify this a bit. What this does not means is

First, we alter the gospel to fit in. The gospel is the whole point. not love

Secondly, it does not mean we sin to fit in. That's what Paul means when he says he's still under the law of Christ. **We are to be chameleons without compromise.**

Rather, outside those two restraints- changing the gospel and sinning, it means adapting everything we can in order to cross as many barriers and pull down as many walls as their might be to....

We must let the gospel do the offending, not our behavior.

When my wife and I went on a mission trip to 11 countries over 11 months, we had a briefing before every country to learn what these offensive elements were, ways that we had to adapt in order to not create a stumbling block for the gospel.

A funny one in Cambodia is it was highly offensive to not clear your plate. This sounds good until you are on your third plate and have put down seven bananas. You are faced with a choice, throw up or offend. We started playing games with this, we had to, by scraping food on each other's plates and wearing baggy sweatshirts to store bananas.

Your job as a missionary, is to fit in and share the gospel! People at work, at the restaurant, family members, your neighbors! It may not be huge cultural barriers that you are crossing, that's okay, you are still to apply this in the best of your ability. The people who you are trying to reach, what are they like, what are the kinds of things they do, how do they speak.

Do the hard work of getting to know them and adapting yourself to their context.

3. Pursue personal holiness while on mission for God

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.

Paul draws upon a metaphor everyone in Corinth would have been familiar with, these were like the Olympic games that would go on in their city. The prize here is salvation, it is to be with Christ. And the main point is that we exercise self-discipline to get there.

And I love how Paul holds up our prize here. Look around, see how even athletes go into strict training, and that for a prize that perishes, but we are pursuing a prize that's imperishable. The world stood in awe at the recent olympics as athlete after athlete was given their medals. That's rubbish compared to knowing Christ.

We need a fresh revelation of future glory, that's what Paul constantly had before him, and it compelled him into service to Jesus.

Let me be very clear, he is not saying that he has to earn his salvation, but rather proving his salvation with discipline. These Corinthians were in serious danger, flirting with all kinds of immorality, wickedness, and demonic behavior.

What he is saying is you must impose strict discipline, not just in how you carry out the mission, but for the life of your own soul. It involves 24/7 discipline. V.27, "But I discipline my body (myself) and keep it under control."

This is not ascetism which believes you are more holy to abstain from bodily desires. Paul completely denounces that. He's not for asceticism or indulgence, he's for Christ. The idea is that the body is being put into service for Jesus. Giving it over to the desires of the Spirit, not to the desires of the flesh.

Paul is exhorting us not to neglect our own walk with the Lord. It's completely possible that we get involved with missions, we become community group leaders, or pastors, we are in church our whole lives, and yet we aren't saved, we will be disqualified in the end, hearing Jesus' words, "depart from me I never knew you." Evidenced by the fact that we have no inclination and no direction towards holiness. When God's Spirit comes in you, it gives birth to practical holiness, not perfectly, but it's in progress. This is a warning to all of us.

What's your race look like? Are you running hard after the Lord? Chasing purity? How is your prayer life, your bible reading? Engagement with community? Are you neglecting the means of grace in your life? How are your affections?

Conclusion

Paul would later say in 11:1, imitate me as I imitate Christ. We have a command from Paul to imitate him, but we also have a command to imitate Christ.

But here is the hope, we are called to imitate Christ in what He has done for us. He's the reason why we can imitate him.

Jesus, perfectly surrendered his rights to serve us. He left his throne in heaven and came to this earth, not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

Jesus perfectly adapted his life to our context, being incarnated into the form of a human, and truly could be said to become all things to all people, so much so that He would actually become, he who knew.. our sin and bear the wrath of God for us, he did so in perfect holiness and self control, all that He might win us and bring us back to God.

Harvest Church, in the power and hope supplied to us in Jesus, let's go and do likewise.