

Friends and Family,

Last week, I re-read 1 Corinthians 9 and got pretty excited; in short order, I had a rough draft of this letter in my mind. I daydreamed phrases and images centered on Paul's example *to become all things to all people, that by all means we may save some*. I began to imagine a post-pandemic push into our neighborhoods, workplaces, and other spheres of influence where the Gospel might do what it does in redeeming a broken world.

I think that letter will still be written, but not this week.

On Monday, Kyle, Christian and I recorded our weekly conversation on chapter 9. We picked up and began to pass around vs. 19-23. We dug into the tension between becoming all things to all people without betraying who we are in Christ. We keyed in on the idea of presence. We can be present with all kinds of people, by laying down our preconceived categories, surrendering our own agenda, as I heard Scott Taylor once describe Feed My Sheep: the ministry of sitting around. For other examples of what this looks like, turn to any page of any gospel. Jesus was and is the perfect embodiment of being fully present to those he meets along the way.

Again, I thought I had my letter: let's go out and be present and do nothing with everyone. And again, the Spirit caused me to wait.

It was yesterday that Kyle sent out the "begin to return" letter, detailing the patience and wisdom discerned by the elders as we wait on the Lord and move in step with His timing, rather than our own.

Now what should I write in this letter? I didn't know. I went for a walk.

As I made my way up a nearby switchback, I began to notice the year's first tiny purple wildflowers, interspersed with still unmelted patches of snow. I thought of the outbreaking of spring in C.S. Lewis's Narnia: Aslan is coming.

And yet there are storms possible this weekend and early next week.

It seems we find ourselves between two seasons: the long winter and the bright spring.

And I am already anticipating summer (an old schoolteacher habit). I want to be present with friends, neighbors, strangers, those we meet along the way. Plus I really want barbecue.

But I sense there is another presence we need to solidly, wholly attend to first: His.

We will only move out in His Power if we have disciplined ourselves to live within it.

I wonder if that's what these next few weeks/months might be about? Solidifying the habits of mind and body that lead us into that quiet where we simply behold Him and become who he has called us to be, that place of resting, that place of refuge and return, that place of abiding.

Let us be present there. Let us be present with Him. I have a feeling he has some things to tell us as each season turns.

Hold fast friends,

Matthew

## 1 Corinthians 9 Outline

### Paul Surrenders His Rights

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

- What is the evidence of an apostle's work?
- In what ways have you seen this type of work in the world?

*3This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4Do we not have the right to eat and drink? 5Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? 7Who 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?*

*8Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? 9For 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? 10Does 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. 11If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?*

- In some traditions, vocational (full time, paid) ministry is a foregone conclusion.
- In other traditions, it's foreign concept.
- How does your experience inform this issue?
- How does Paul's writing here inform this issue?

*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. 13Do 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? 14In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.*

*15But 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. 16For 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! 17For 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. 18What 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.*

- Twice in these verses we see Paul surrender his rights?
- Why does he do this?
- In what ways can we do this (what forces/habits keep us from doing this)?

*19For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20To 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. 21To 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. 22To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*

- For Paul, what is a cause greater than freedom?
- Who are the "Jews, Greeks, those outside the law, and the weak of our contemporary culture"
- In practical ways, what does it look like to *become all things* without losing our Christ-centeredness?

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

- What does your race look like in this season?
- How might your race look different viewed in light of eternity?
- What do you suppose Paul meant by self-control and discipline.
- What habits/practices/disciplines do you maintain? Why?