

Topic	A Call to Love the Lost
Reference	1 Corinthian 9
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The love and the concern shown for the lost boys in Thailand, who were trapped inside a cave had been translated into action at a great cost but the boys were saved. As followers of Jesus, we are called to love the lost and that's not just the physically lost like the boys in the cave, but it concerns an even greater type of lostness, a lostness of even greater consequence than being a kilometer underground 4 miles into a cave. We are talking about a spiritual lostness, those who have not yet accepted Christ in faith are spiritually lost, which means we are separated from a close relationship with God. We are in danger of going through eternity, separated from God when we are spiritually lost.

Being called to love the lost is more than just some kind of a feeling, it is a call to action. A call to do something about the lostness. In 1-Cor 8, we were reminded that knowledge without love is worthless, but we see that love will build up. Knowledge with love is powerful.

If you have been a Christian for any period of time, if you have been in church very much, you do have some biblical knowledge, you do have some spiritual knowledge, but the question that we should each ask ourselves is, do I combine my spiritual and biblical knowledge with love. Does love motivates me to put into practice the knowledge that I have. For example, we know that people without Christ are lost, they are separated from God, missing out on the most important things in this life, deprived of eternal life with God in heaven forever. The question is what am I doing about it. Based on this knowledge that people are lost, do I really have a love for the lost that is being translated into action. 1-Cor 8 says, we all have knowledge.

For example, as a Christian you probably can quote the Great Commission in one form or another or at least come fairly close to quoting that you know the gist of it. We can quote scriptures like this;

Matt 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (all peoples, all ethnic groups) ...

Luke 24:47 Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in Christ's name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (beginning where you are)

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the world

These verses can be great to memorize but better verses to put into action. Many of us have this knowledge but what are we doing with this knowledge. Knowledge needs to be combined with love. Love first of all for God. If we love God, we love him with all our heart, our soul, our strength and our mind and Jesus said, if you love me you will keep my commandments. Our knowledge needs to be combined with love for others. Now love for others is more than just being nice and polite and friendly and smiling and greeting each other during the welcome time, but a love for another person goes beyond just trying to be nice and polite. If you are a believer, are you glad that somebody shared the gospel with you. You are absolutely glad that somebody shared the gospel with you. You are glad you had the opportunity to call on Christ in faith.

Jesus said, love your neighbor as yourself, do to others as you want other people to do to you. When people have done something great for you, such as sharing the gospel, don't you want to do that for them also. We have knowledge but do we act on it in love. In chapter 8, Paul was talking there about being willing to make sacrifices, been willing to give up some of his rights in order to help fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those whose faith was weak. He would give up his rights in order to help people grow in faith. That theme is continued today but it has broadened and expanded. Here Paul continues talking about being willing to give up rights, give up freedoms, make sacrifices but in order that lost people will have a chance to hear and respond to the gospel. This theme of being willing to make sacrifices and do everything to help people come to faith in Christ and to help them grow, it continues, not only through this chapter but the next chapter, it goes on into chapter 11 and there in chapter 11 Paul says,

1 Cor 11:1 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Now you might ask, why I am throwing in that verse two chapters later. It is because some people can get quite creative when it comes to making excuses for why they are disobedient to God. Paul was just talking about himself in this passage. Paul was an apostle, I am not Paul, I am not an apostle would tend to our excuse. Paul knew that some of the people reading his letter and some of us today would make that excuse, so it goes on, at the end of his argument saying and what I said about myself that's the lifestyle for you as a follower of Jesus to

also follow. Paul remember when he was in Corinth was not a fulltime minister. Some of us also get creative in saying, well yeah Paul was a fulltime minister, but I have a job, I can't do this. Paul when he was in Corinth had a job. He was not supported by the church. He worked fulltime and yet was still involved in ministry, still involved in sharing the gospel, just like many of our church members are too today, who are fully involved in jobs but also working hard for the kingdom of God.

So when we look at our text today, don't just think well that was Paul who was an apostle, he was somebody special, he too was working for a living and he is telling us, follow his example because this is what Christ wants us to do. From our text in 1-Corinthians chapter 9, there are several key verses I want to focus in on.

1 Cor. 9:12 ... we endure all things, in order that we may not cause any hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

9:16 ... Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

9:19 ... I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

9:22-23 ... 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, ...

When we look at these key verses and think not only of Paul but also think of us we will see the four points that I want us to emphasize from our text today. We will see that:

Loving the Lost includes:

1. enduring everything in order not to put an obstacle in the way of the Gospel
2. having a passion to share the Good News
3. taking the initiative to cross barriers
4. placing high personal priority on God using you to touch the lives of others

Just a brief reminder that the gospel message is the good news about what God has done through Jesus Christ, especially His crucifixion & resurrection; His ascension & exaltation as Lord and it is the good news of God's promise of forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with Him, and eternal life to all who repent and believe.

LOVING THE LOST INCLUDES ENDURING EVERYTHING IN ORDER NOT TO PUT AN OBSTACLE IN THE WAY OF THE GOSPEL

Now it is interesting in the very first few verses of our text, Paul is asking some rhetorical questions, questions that have an obvious answer. It seems that the

people in Corinth were questioning whether he was really an apostle or not. Some Paul asks,

1 Cor. 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.

Now it is hard to imagine, why anybody in Corinth would be questioning Paul's authority as an apostle. Because if he was not an apostle, their faith would be in vain. If he is not an apostle, perhaps they had believed a false message, perhaps they had been deceived, perhaps they were still dead in their sins and separated from God. So I can't imagine why they must have been questioning his apostleship but possibly after sometime they had been exposed to some other characters who claimed to be apostles, who might have had a stronger charismatic personality, more likeable with more charm, able to wow or impress the congregation with their stage appearance, may be they found people who are a stronger more forceful speaker, a person who was more forceful and authoritative and demanding that he be the boss and demanding that he get all of the rights. Perhaps, they had been exposed to somebody who had entertained them and make them feel good, and in fact Paul didn't do any of that for us. Paul had already told the people,

1 Cor 2:1 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. **2** For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **4** My message and my preaching were not accompanied by clever, wise words, but by a display of the Spirit's power,

For some reason Paul was trying to defend his apostleship and one reason he was having to defend his apostleship was because he had not claimed any of the rights that he rightfully should have had by the fact that he was an apostle. So Paul says,

1 Cor. 9:3 This is my defense to those who would examine me:

He goes ahead to list three rights that he should have as an apostle. He said.

4 We have the right to earn our food, don't we?

5 We have the right to take a believing wife with us like the other apostles, the Lord's brothers, and Cephas, don't we?

6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to keep on working for a living?

In other words, he is saying, yes I have a right as an apostle to not have to work a secular job, you as a congregation should be supporting me and covering my expenses and if I have a wife and family, covering those expenses as well. These are the rights that Paul said he had but yet he had not claimed, but he wants to defend that yes he rightfully has these rights and he uses first of all just some illustrations from secular everyday life

9:7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its grapes? Or who takes care of a flock and does not drink any of its milk?

Now Paul quotes from the Old Testament, the book of Deuteronomy 25 and he says in

9 For in the Law of Moses it is written, "You must not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." God is not only concerned about oxen, is he?

What he is saying is, if an ox is allowed to eat while he is working, surely a minister of the gospel and apostle has a right to eat and he goes on with some additional arguments from agriculture

10 Isn't he really speaking for our benefit? Yes, this was written for our benefit, because the one who plows should plow in hope, and the one who threshes should thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.

He goes on and says,

9:11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap material benefits from you?

So several reasons, why he should have these rights and he says

12 If others enjoy this right over you, don't we have a stronger claim?

After all he is the one that founded the church. He is the first one to bring the gospel. He makes a very strong statement to conclude this but we will come back to this because he really doesn't conclude it here. He comes up with some more reasons why he has rights. In verse 13, he goes back to the Old Testament and points out the fact that the priests did not have a secular job. When the tribes of Israel went into the promised land, the tribe of Levite was not given any land, they were to live from the tithes and offerings that were brought to the

temple because of their service to God and the temple. Then if that's not enough then he quotes the Lord himself and he says even Jesus commanded that

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

So yes, it is okay to pay pastors, it is okay to pay missionaries; it is okay to pay people who are involved in fulltime ministry and Paul had these rights. He could have claimed the right for food and drink, claimed the right to bring a wife along at church expense, claimed the right to not have to work a secular job but, and here is where he makes a very important statement about rights, he also has the right not to claim these rights. He has the freedom not to exert his freedom because of the greater good. More important to Paul than claiming his rights, is that people come to faith in Jesus Christ. We will go back to verse 12 again,

12...On the contrary, we endure everything in order not to put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

The word obstacle or hinderance is an interesting word. It is used only here in the New Testament and it comes from the military. The word obstacle or hinderance here is the word that is used if an advancing army is coming then you just totally destroy the road on which they are advancing, so that they will not be able to advance anymore.

Paul is saying, he does not want to do anything that would stop, not even slow down the advance of the gospel. Paul states, yes there was the possibility that he or for that matter we could do things that would put a hindrance or an obstacle in the way of the advance of the gospel, but by the same token we could do things that would help the spread of the gospel. We can hinder the advance, we can help the advance. The same is true for all of us. We can advance the spread of the gospel by our verbal witness, by our consistent lifestyle, we can hinder the advance of the gospel by our lack of verbal witness or by a self-centered lifestyle or we don't get involved with the lives of other people and share with them. We can advance the gospel when we think of other people, their needs and what can I do to have a positive influence in their life. We can hinder the gospel by thinking primarily of our self, primarily of our rights and not being willing to sacrifice anything in order to reach other people.

So ask yourself, may there be something in your life that is hindering the advance of the gospel, something you are doing or maybe something you are not doing or saying that would hinder the advance. Also ask, what am I doing that would help to advance the gospel and the gospel cause. What am I saying, what am I doing,

how am I living that would advance it? Paul said he was willing to endure everything in order not to put a block in the way of the advance of the gospel and later on in writing to the Corinthians he listed some of the things he had endured, being jailed, being severely beaten, being stoned and left for dead, going hungry, wondering where the next meal would come from, working hard day and night, yes Paul was willing to endure all things, give up his rights and that was something he would not have had to do. If you remember Paul before he became a believer in Jesus, he had a very successful luxurious easy life. He was a recognized scholar, a respected religious leader in the society that paid very high respect for the religious leader. He was an influencer of public opinion, prestige, power, authority, money, anything he needed he had. He had an easy life and he would have continued to have an easy life if he had not followed Jesus.

Well that's just the opposite message of what you hear some people preaching today, who claim a gospel that is not a gospel but it is seducing people with health and wealth and prosperity. Paul had a luxurious life but he gave it up for the gospel. Why? He wanted to follow the example of Jesus, which we see very clearly in Philippians chapter 2

Philippians 2:6 (Jesus) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but **emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant**, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus had all the rights and privileges of God, He is God in heaven, angel serving him but yet he was willing to leave that comfortable environment. He emptied himself. He suffered as a man. He experienced hunger, thirst, pain and he suffered a humiliating death. Why did he give up all of this? To bring salvation to lost people. Yes Paul had rights, he defended those rights, but he also defended his right to give up the rights and he showed the reason why he was willing to do it. He wanted to give up anything that might possibly put a barrier in front of somebody listening to or accepting the gospel. Paul loved the lost and loving the lost includes enduring everything in order not to put an obstacle in the way of the gospel.

LOVING THE LOST INCLUDES HAVING A PASSION TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS

9:16...Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

Now when we see this word 'preach the gospel', some of us think, 'okay that lets me off the hook' because I am not a preacher. Preaching the gospel is the good news that angel preached on Jesus's birth. That's the same good news that we proclaim, the same good news Paul proclaimed, Jesus has come. He is the savior. He is the promised Messiah. He is the Lord. So Paul had this burning desire to share the gospel. It is like the prophet Jeremiah who said, when the word of God is in me, it burns like a fire and I cannot keep quiet. Paul is saying, my life would be empty, it would be void, it would be meaningless, it would not be worth living, it would be devastated if I weren't able to share the good news with other people. He had an inner compulsion, this desire, because he had a heart that belong to God, a heart that had been changed by God, a heart that was truly seeking to glorify God.

Ask yourself this morning, do you have the desire to share the good news of what God has done with others. Do you really care? Do you love lost people? Because loving lost people includes having this passion to share the good news. Not only does Paul talk about this passion in verse 16, in verse 19 he also says,

9:19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

Paul is free but that is not what he is concerned about. What's his passion is, what his desire is, is to win more people to Christ even to the point of becoming a servant. Paul knows people will not call on the name of the Lord in faith if they have never heard of the Lord and he knows they are not going to hear of him unless somebody that knows him tells them. So Paul we see here is more concerned about reaching people for Christ then he is about his rights and he is willing to be a servant to all.

LOVING THE LOST INCLUDES TAKING THE INITIATIVE TO CROSS BARRIERS

Barriers of all kinds, racial, religious, linguistic, socioeconomic barriers. We see this in verse 20,

9:20 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. 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. 22 To 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.

So here we see Paul taking the initiative to cross barriers to go to other people, willing to go outside the comfort zone, willing to go to people that have different culture, different religion, different ethnic background, different social status. If we truly love the lost, we like Paul will take the initiative to go to people, even to those that are different from us, that are outside our comfort zone. Now some people have misunderstood Paul's words here. When you look at Paul's words here, you can't just take one or two verses, you need to look at the entire context of what he has written. Before I talk more about what Paul meant with these verses, let me first of all talk a little bit about what he did not mean.

When he say, I become all things to all people, he did not mean when in Rome do as the Romans, which is a common phrase for, hey if am with this group of people I will engage in all of their activities, it doesn't matter whether it pleases God or not. I will commit these sins when I am with this group of people because I will be just like everybody around me. That's not what he is saying, he is not promoting situational ethics. He is not saying, well since everybody else is doing and I am going to do the same thing, Paul did not join in the wild drunken routines that were common in the city of Corinth. He did not employ the services of temple prostitutes like many of the men in the city of Corinth did. Like today, it would not be a good idea to try to start using cracked cocaine just in order to try to reach drug addicts. That's not what Paul is talking about. Paul also is not talking about changing or diluting the gospel message. He was true to the gospel message, no compromise. At the beginning of the letter to the Corinthians, he had pointed this out, I preach Christ crucified, knowing this would be a stumbling block to the Jews, knowing it would be folly or foolishness to the gentiles, but I am not going to compromise the message whether it might be a stumbling block or folly, I will change things in my life, so they won't be a stumbling block but I cannot change the gospel message. If they stumble over the gospel, there is nothing we can do. We can't change it.

So that's the beginning of the letter and at the end of the letter, Paul once again emphasizes the message that he preached that was of highest important, which is Christ died for our sins according to the scripture. He was buried. He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and he appeared to many witnesses. This is the undiluted pure gospel message that Paul preached and Paul did not compromise on sin. He called the Corinthians out on many sins. We have already seen that he called them out on their pride, on their immorality, on their greed, on their lack of love and he will go on and list other sins. So he is not being soft on sin. Some preacher and some churches don't really want to mention sin because they don't want to give people a bad feeling, just try to make people feel good and then keep them happy, keep them entertained. Yes, God wants us to have joy, but the joy comes from having our sin forgiven and

being in a right relation with God. God wants us to have peace, harmony but that's not going to come when sin is separating us from God. You can't just try to treat symptoms on the surface and polish over. Sin is a problem and Paul addressed the sin. That's why Paul frequently preached everybody the need for repentance towards God, repentance of sin, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So in these verses, Paul is not talking about compromising the gospel message, he is not saying join in sinful lifestyle and he is not saying to ignore sin. What did Paul mean when he wrote these words?

I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

First of all, he just meant that he is going to take the initiative that he is going to cross the cultural barriers. He is going to try to develop relationships including with people who have different backgrounds than he does. Don't approach people with the sense of superiority, condescendingly looking down on others because we think we might be better financially or socially, professionally, racially. It means to be flexible, adaptable, sensitive to other cultures and world views. The example Paul gives in verse 20

9:20 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.

The Jews had over 600 commandments that they were expected to follow plus interpretations and various applications making the list even longer. Paul knew these laws, he practiced them before. So he had no problem, when he was with the Jewish people he will follow their customs. Knowing that keeping these laws are not what makes him right with God, faith in Christ is what made him right with God, but it shows he is willing to be flexible adapting as needed, so people will not be offended, so that they will listen when he talks about God.

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.

He would eat with them whatever they want to eat, because Jesus had declared all foods to be clean. When he is with the Jewish people he would not keep every single Sabbath regulation because he knew that God had created all days which are holy to the Lord. So what Paul is trying to say here, people who are not Jews do not have to accept Jewish culture in order to become a Christian. A person who comes to faith does not have to adopt a totally foreign culture and give up their culture in order to be a Christian. Yes we need to give up idol

worship, yes we need to give up sinful practices, but that does not mean we have to totally change cultures. In verse 22, he continues and talks

22 To 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.

Couple of weeks ago we saw that the weak were those who have accepted Christ but they came from an idolatrous background and so they are wondering what from my former life can I keep, what do I have to get rid of. If an animal has been sacrificed at a temple, can I eat that meat and Paul is saying, there is absolutely nothing wrong with eating that meat, but I am willing not to eat that meat if it will cost somebody to stumble. If it will keep somebody from coming to faith or keep somebody from growing in their faith, I am willing to not be involved with that. I think there are many Chinese and Tamil Christians in Malaysia who come from Buddhist or Traditional Chinese religious background or Hindu background, who are asking some of the same questions today. I want to glorify God but I don't want to alienate family and friends. I want to show respect for family, especially parents but I don't want to sin against God. these are existential questions that needed to be addressed and answered. So Paul in his discussion about meat says, I know what is right but I am also not going to do anything that will hurt somebody else.

This passage is also saying communicate the gospel but make sure what you are communicating is the gospel. Communicate it clearly, communicate it in terminology that others can understand but don't confuse the gospel with nonessentials. Sometimes we mix things up with the gospel. A lot of times we preach a cultural baggage that is not gospel. Many people think that Christianity is a Western religion, because most expressions, most forms of worship, most discipleship materials, most evangelism materials are western oriented and so people get the idea, well if I am going to become a Christian that's the same thing as becoming a westerner and I don't want to be a westerner, I am proud of my heritage, I am proud of my ethnic identity, I am proud of my culture, so I don't want to be a Christian. We need to do something about that, like Paul did. That's what Paul is saying here, you don't have to give up everything in your culture. Now I think that's one reason some of the Chinese and Tamils in this country have not become Christians.

Other thing Paul is saying is when you are relating to other people, adopt attitudes and lifestyles that are appealing to others. Let them see Christ in you, see his grace, his mercy and his love, avoid self-centeredness, avoid legalism and judgmentalism.

Notice the progression, Paul is talking about I want to win more, I want to win those under the law, win those outside the law, win the weak, I want to save them, save some. Now he knows, he can't save them but through his words of testimony God will save them and he knows not everybody will come to faith but many people will.

LOVING THE LOST INCLUDES PLACING HIGH PERSONAL PRIORITY ON GOD USING YOU TO TOUCH THE LIVES OF OTHERS

9:23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Then Paul goes on and gives illustrations from the world of sports. The city of Corinth was the center of the Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympic Games and people were use to seeing athletes making great sacrifices, athletes who would deprive themselves of things, athletes who would work hard, exert a lot of effort, spend a lot of time to win a crown that was made out of celery leaves. All that work to get celery leaves, why not invest your life, sacrifice, put in the energy, the time, the self-discipline in order to gain an imperishable crown, the crown of eternal life.

I want to end with a story of a rescue mission. This happened about a 150 years ago. A European man from Belgium named Damien went to what was then called the Sandwich Islands, we know it is Hawaii today. This is before the days of the five-star hotels on the beach, before the nice seaside restaurants with the fine cuisine, quite primitive lifestyle there compared to Europe. Shortly after he arrived in Hawaii he was ordained as a priest and he had a desire to try to help the outcasts, those who had been shunned by society. Because you see the government in Hawaii had forced all the people with leprosy to be isolated and they were restricted to one small section of one small peninsula of one of the smaller islands and they were forced to be away from all the people, from all the cities, from all society which meant also being separated from any goods and services, being separated from civilization. These people had been shunned by society, separated and now they are suffering from their diseases but Father Damien felt that God was calling him to go and share the gospel with these people. He knew the words of Jesus, for Jesus says I have come to seek and save the lost and he knew that Jesus had also said, as the father sent me so I am sending you.

So Damien went from one of the more prosperous civilized areas of Hawaiian islands to live among this leper colony and after being there for about six months, he wrote to his brother back in Belgium and he said, I make myself a

leper with the lepers to gain all for Jesus Christ. Damien meant of course becoming a leper, I am living like the lepers, I am living with lepers, I am living in isolation, like them I am suffering hardships caused by the isolation, the separation from civilization, I am eating with them, I am sharing my life with them, I am investing in relationships with them, but after 10-12 years father Damien himself was struck with leprosy and after he was struck with leprosy he noticed that he had an even greater impact, even more people were willing to listen to the good news. They were more receptive, more people coming to faith and even though he was sick he continued faithfully in ministry as long as he could, truly he had become a leper with the lepers to gain all for Jesus Christ.

About 16 years after writing those words, five years after being diagnosed with the illness Father Damien died of leprosy. Father Damien had loved the lost of this leper colony. He had a passion to see them come to faith in Christ. His love had been translated into action and it cost him dearly. Was it worth it? I think if you ask Father Damien, if he could speak to us from heaven, surrounded by those people who are also in heaven that he led to faith in Christ, he would say yes, it definitely was worth it. Even to die with the lepers in order that they might accept Christ.