

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? ⁸ **Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing?** ⁹ **For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain."** **Is it about oxen that God is concerned?** ¹⁰ **Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.** ¹¹ **If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?** ¹² **If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?**

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

¹⁹ **Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.** ²⁰ **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.** ²¹ **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.** ²² **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.** ²³ **I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.** (NIV84)

Theme: Your ambition is for the gospel

1. You willingly give up for the gospel.
2. You willingly put aside for the gospel.

What is your goal in life? What's your ambition? Perhaps it's to raise a family. To get a job you enjoy. Or maybe it's to make more money, to be financially stable. Perhaps your life-long ambition is simply to be happy. Or maybe to make a difference in people's lives.

That last one was the Apostle, Paul's ambition. But he didn't fulfill that ambition by being nice to someone, giving them a lot of money, or giving them a shot at fame. No, he made a difference in people's lives by sharing the gospel with them. You have this same ambition. Your

ambition is not for yourself, but for the gospel of Christ. Because of this you willingly give up and put aside for the gospel.

Paul was on his second Missionary Journey. He had already been traveling for quite some time when he reached a port city in Greece called, Corinth. There he met a Christian from Italy named Aquilla and Priscilla. They were tentmakers—like Paul. So Paul joined them in their work. He worked with them for a year and a half. It wasn't an easy job. Paul probably put in long hours. But when he got off of work he didn't get to go home and relax. He went to his second job—one that he didn't get paid for. Paul also served as a missionary and a pastor. He was in Corinth to spread the gospel and start a congregation. He wasn't paid for this, so he went to work as a tent maker simply so he could survive.

Paul could have been paid. He should have been paid for spreading the gospel. But he refused to demand it. Paul makes it perfectly clear in this letter and others that he had the right to be paid. Just like anyone who works, he deserves to be paid—and more since he did a great work. **If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?**

Jesus agreed. Once when he sent the disciples out to spread the gospel he told them not to worry about supporting themselves, for they will be taken care of because, **a worker deserves his wages.**

Paul had the right to be compensated for his work. But he wasn't. That was his own choice. He willingly was not paid for spreading the gospel. Why? For the sake of the gospel. **We did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.** Paul didn't want to offend anyone. He was working with Christians who were new and relatively weak in their faith. He didn't want to offend them for taking payment from them for spreading the gospel. He was afraid that some might be turned off to the gospel by this. Paul was worried that if he made use of his right for compensation, some might not want to hear the gospel. For the sake of the gospel Paul and his companions didn't want to be paid. Instead they willingly endured the pain and hardships of working two jobs, but only getting paid for one of them. They decided

it was better to support themselves and work themselves into the ground than it was to hinder the gospel. It did it make their ministry that much harder, not to mention their lives. But to them it was worth it, for their ambition was for the gospel.

Paul gave up compensation for the sake of the gospel. In a different way we give up something too. At least we should. But many times our ambition is not on the gospel, but on ourselves. We like our life. We work hard for our money. And we have the tendency to hoard it for ourselves. Oh sure, we'll give some here and there. But it's not like the amount we give is really giving anything up. Our goals are still on track. We can still buy what we want, and retire early and comfortably. When it comes to giving something up for the sake of the gospel, we often hesitate.

That is until we recall what our offerings go toward. They go to spreading the gospel. You willingly give up your possessions so that we can do our work here at Holy Cross of teaching and spreading the news. So that our children may be taught God's Word, so that our adults can grow in their knowledge of the Lord and faith in him. So that we may spread the gospel to Standish, Sterling, Omer, Au Gres, Pinconning, and all the surrounding areas. So that we may help open new congregations throughout the country. Or send missionaries all over the world. So we can help spread the gospel to all those who do not know Christ. For Christ is really all that matters. A person can have a wonderful life, but if he doesn't believe in Christ, then it doesn't matter.

And so we have the same ambition as Paul. It's not on ourselves. We are not ambitious for our own lives. Rather, we are ambitious for the gospel. You want people to know Christ and believe in him. You want everyone to know who their Savior is. For he lived a perfect life in our place, suffered through hell, and rose all so that our sins would be removed and so that, through faith, we may join him in heaven forever. Your ambition is the spread of the gospel. It is to get as many people in heaven as possible.

But like Paul you not only give up for the gospel, but you also set aside for the gospel.

Paul, like all Christians, was free to live the life that he wanted. As long as it corresponded to God's Word, he could do whatever he wanted. He could eat what he wanted to eat. Drink what he wanted to drink. Worship when and where he wanted to worship. He could do what he wanted to do. But there are times when that might not have been beneficial. There are times when doing what you are free to do might cause harm to the gospel. It might hinder the spread of the gospel. So Paul, from time to time put aside his rights to live as he wanted to for the sake of spreading the gospel to others. He made himself like others in order to reach them. In other instances, he did whatever he could in order to not cause offense to the gospel. He did this for all groups of people he came across. To the Jews he acted and thought like a Jew. He always visited the Jewish Synagogue when he first entered a city. And he explained to them through the Old Testament that Jesus is the promised Savior. Once he even circumcised Timothy because the Jews they were going to be spreading the gospel to knew he wasn't a Jew. So even though he was free to not be circumcised, through the work of Christ, he decided to set aside his freedom for the sake of the gospel. He also acted like gentiles when he needed to. Paul versed himself in the philosophies and poets of the Gentiles. He would often quote them as he made points about the gospel. Paul also put himself in the shoes of the weak. For instance, back in Paul's day most of the meat you could buy at the market was left over from being sacrifices to a false god. And some who were weak in their faith thought it was wrong to eat such meat. Since there is not such thing as another god, Paul said it wasn't a sin to eat such meat. But someone may think if you could eat meat sacrificed to an idol, it's also ok to worship that idol. So at times, Paul set aside his right to eat such meat. Paul concludes, **When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, 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.**

Paul often put himself in others' shoes for the sake of the gospel—he became like them—thinking like them so he could better share the gospel with them. We have the opportunity to do this as well. But do we? We must admit that we aren't always ambitious for the gospel. Rather we are ambitious for ourselves. We often aren't comfortable

with putting ourselves in other people's shoes. We hesitate to get out of our comfort zone. We may see a need, but it's not something we like doing, so we don't do anything about it. We chose our rights instead of the gospel, and as a result the gospel is hindered. You may not want to teach young children, to share the gospel with a friend, or to knock on doors. And it's your right to choose not to do those things. But that may not be the best choice as far as the gospel is concerned.

Paul often gave up his rights for the sake of the gospel as well. We too have opportunities to do this. Although you are free to do whatever you want, at times making use of your rights may not be beneficial. For instance, alcohol is a blessing from God—to be used in moderation. But it may not be wise to drink it in front of an alcoholic, thus tempting him to sin. Or it may not be wise to drink it in front of someone weak in their faith, who believe it is a sin—you might turn him off to the gospel. There are times when we may not make use of our rights in order to not cause offense. We then willingly set aside our rights in order to not hinder the gospel. We follow Paul's example of being ambitious for the gospel, not ourselves. **I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.**

But why do we do all of this? Why do we avoid certain things we are free to do? Because our ambition is not ourselves and our wants. Our ambition is the gospel. We want all people to know Christ. We want everyone to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. For he also gave up something for the gospel. He gave up the riches and blessings of heaven to come down to live on this earth. He put aside full use of his divine power—only giving us small glimpses from time to time. He set aside his wants and desires when he was betrayed, brutally beaten and flogged. And he gave up his life so that we might have ours. Because Christ gave up and set aside for the sake of the gospel, we want to do the same as well. Paul did. And We want them to see that Christ lived a perfect life for us. That he died an innocent death only to become guilty of all our sins. That he rose from the dead. And through faith in him all believers will live in heaven forever. We are ambitious for the gospel because we are concerned about the eternal welfare of all people. So we do whatever needs to be done so that Christ might save some.

Paul's ambition was for the gospel. So he gave up his income so he wouldn't cause offense and bring people to faith. He put himself in other people's shoes, he gave up certain rights so as to offend others. He put aside what he wanted for the sake of the gospel. And so do we. We do whatever it takes to spread the gospel. We do whatever we have to do so that we may not hinder people from hearing about their one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.