

## Sermon Summary | Sunday 10th May 2026 | 1 Corinthians 9

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul continues the theme of God's guidance for life's decisions, especially in those areas where the Bible does not give a simple black-and-white command. The question is not whether we may do something sinful or idolatrous, but how we should use our freedom, rights, time, money, energy, and relationships in a way that honours Christ. In this chapter, Paul gives us a searching guiding question: will this help or hinder the gospel?

First, Paul teaches us to hold our rights lightly. He begins by defending his apostleship and his genuine rights. As an apostle, he has the right to food and drink, to material support, and to earn his living from gospel ministry. He supports this from ordinary life, from the Old Testament law, and from the command of the Lord Jesus. Paul is not pretending that rights do not matter. They do. Rest, support, time, money, and personal needs all matter. But they are not supreme.

Paul's striking example is that he chooses not to make full use of his rights if doing so would put an obstacle in the way of the gospel. He is willing to give up what he could legitimately claim because the gospel matters more. This challenges us to ask not only, "Am I allowed to do this?" but, "Should I insist on this right here, in this situation, if it may hinder gospel work?" Christian guidance often begins when the preciousness of the gospel reshapes the way we think about comfort, convenience, and entitlement.

Second, Paul teaches us to meet people where they are. Though he is free, he makes himself a servant to all, seeking to win as many as possible. To Jews he becomes as a Jew; to those outside the law, as one outside the law; to the weak, he becomes weak. Yet this flexibility has limits. Paul does not change the message, abandon the truth, or disobey Christ. He adapts his manner, customs, and approach, but not his Master.

This speaks powerfully into ordinary life. At the school gate, in the workplace, on our street, in church, or among newer people, we can easily remain with what is familiar and comfortable. We may not be hostile, but we may fail to move towards others. Paul's example asks whether we are retreating into comfort or 'crossing the gap' for the sake of the gospel. The offence of the cross must remain, but unnecessary barriers such as coldness, thoughtlessness, insider language, or failure to notice others can and should be removed.

Third, Paul calls us to live with purpose. Using the image of an athlete, he reminds us that the Christian life is not aimless. Athletes train, exercise self-control, and say no to some things in order to pursue a greater prize. In the same way, Christians must consider not only major life decisions, but also habits, routines, and patterns. A life that is permanently full, reactive, distracted, and without margin for prayer, people, or ministry may not look rebellious, but it may still be drifting.

God's guidance in 1 Corinthians 9 is not guidance by secret signs, but guidance by reshaped priorities. Paul calls us to hold our rights lightly, meet people where they are, and live with purpose. Above all, he points us to Christ, who did not cling to his rights, did not remain at a distance, and did not live aimlessly, but came towards us, gave himself for us, and brought sinners home to God. As the gospel becomes precious to us, our decisions begin to change.

### Questions for personal reflection

1. Where am I most tempted to insist on my rights, comfort, or preferences, even when holding them more lightly might better serve the gospel?
2. In my present patterns of life, am I moving purposefully towards people for Christ, or am I quietly drifting into comfort, busyness, and self-protection?