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Title: *Happier*

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:1-27

Speaker: Russ Brasher

Well, it is good to be together with all of you this morning. Feel free to turn and say good morning to someone on your left or right in front of you. Behind you. Go ahead. That's a password trick to make sure everyone's awake for the message.

By the way, good job. I thought it was fitting to highlight what took place with the Walk for the Homeless a couple of weekends ago. Because as we continue in our happier series, walking through the book of First Corinthians, we arrive at chapter nine this morning, and we're going to go through the whole chapter verses 1 through 27.

And in it at the very end, Paul is going to wrap up his argument with this image of athletes who are running a race. And so, it is only fitting to see how cool it is that some of the concepts that we see in Scripture are being literally played out and displayed here in the greater community to help benefit those in Pittsburgh and all over the place.

And as we walk through today's text, my hope is that together we will try to answer a very big question. That question is what does it mean to be both compelled and yet flexible with the gospel? Again, let that question sink in for a minute. Maybe try to answer it for yourself. I promise that together we'll come up with one later.

But what does it mean to be both compelled yet flexible well with the gospel? And before we jump into today's text, I just want to take a moment and state that it is a privilege and an honor to be up here today walking through God's word together with you. But I wasn't supposed to be here. Our senior pastor, Kurt Bjorklund, was scheduled to preach this weekend but over Memorial Day weekend, he sustained a few serious injuries while working on his house that has caused him to miss out on the next couple of weeks as he heals and recovers.

And I want to share that there's good news about this, that he is no longer in the hospital. He is now home being pampered, loved, and supported by his wife, Faith, and his boys. And he is healing and recovering, and he is in good spirits. And we still communicate quite often via face time and even stop over to say, hey.

But I just wanted to take a moment to let you know if you didn't. If you were expecting him and now, you're stuck with me, I'm so sorry, but here we are. But I want to pray for Kurt. I want to pray for his healing. I want to pray for today. So, would you guys join me in prayer for a moment?

Heavenly Father, Lord, thank you for continuing to watch over and heal Kurt, as he recovers from this accident, from these injuries. Lord, would you continue to remind him of how much you love him, surround him and support him, and bring healing and quick recovery Lord. And we know that Kurt wants so badly to be here this morning, that he loves you, that he loves this church, that he loves the folks that call Orchard Hill home, and that he loves the greater Pittsburgh community.

And so, we ask that you continue to heal him and bless him and his family. Thank you for today. Thank you for your Word. Thank you that we get the freedom and the right to gather here and look at it together. Lord, would you meet us in this as we open your word. In your name, we pray. Amen.

I don't know about you, but I love a good, compelling argument. I love to just sit in front and watch two people have one. I love to witness and listen. And sometimes if I'm feeling up for it, I'll just start one. I don't know if that's true of you. I know an easy one that doesn't take a whole lot of compelling someone or convincing them is Chick-Fil-A.

And I would give a great compelling argument of why Chick-Fil-A, I believe, is hands down the greatest fast-food restaurant. There's nothing even close to it. Does anybody else agree with me here? Thank you. You're my friends again. Another one that is maybe a little bit harder because everyone has a difference of opinion. But I believe and I can give a great argument and give sound reasoning that the movie Sandlot is the best movie that has ever been made throughout the history of cinematography. If you don't think so, I'm sorry, but we're no longer friends, and maybe you just haven't really seen it. So, go home and watch it again, and it'll change your mind.

I don't even have to tell you another one. And this is where it kind of divides the room a little bit. But, you know, we're at a church, so we'll figure it out. This idea that if you really love what you're about to eat, I would try to convince you that you should never then ever put mustard or pickles on it, because then you just ruined it, ruined your internal organs. And, we're going to pay for that later, one way or another. Or at least the people around you.

But whatever it is for you, we all have something that we are convinced of and we want to proselytize, that we want to convince other people about. And we spend a good amount of our days and time doing it. I don't know what those are for you. Maybe, you know, for a lot of people, it's sports or certain athletes and which one is better or which one's the worst?

Thankfully, we live in Pittsburgh where we don't have to have a lot of arguments unless we're talking about the Pirates. You know, maybe for you, it's political issues or current affairs. Maybe for you, it's a particular brand and how this brand is better than any other brand. And you can prove it if someone will just sit down and listen to you for 38 minutes or whatever that thing is for you.

Here's what I know. We all do it. We all proselytize. If you're not sure what it is that you often are proselytizing and trying to convince people about, and you came here with someone, or if you're married, just turn right now to them and ask them, is this true of me? And watch them go, oh, is it true of you? Let me tell you how you do this.

And what I also know is that not only that we all do this, but typically we will do this with things that we care deeply about, that we love, or that we are convinced that we need most in this life. Let me give you an example. If you have children. I do. My daughter, our oldest daughter, Peyton, has been for weeks now, months even, compelled to convince me and my wife, Lindsay, that she is at the age where she now needs an iPhone.

And now me and my wife, we are convinced and trying to compel her that no, honey, you do not need an iPhone yet. That is going to open you up to a whole world of things that I don't think that you're quite ready for or you understand. But she does not think that. I don't think she listens when I start talking about those kinds of things because she is convinced that she needs an iPhone. And so, we're working through that.

But here's what I also know is that whenever we have personally experienced something, the closer something is to our hearts, the more that we have walked through and felt it, and when it has become personal to us, those are the things that we will proselytize about the most. And spend our days trying to convince people of what we think to be true or know to be true.

And I'm proud to say that as a church, Orchard Hill, since 1989 has been compelled to convince people of something. And it's been the gospel message that even though our mission statement, its wording has changed over the years, the essence

of it has remained the same. Helping people find and follow Jesus since 1989. And I love that about this church.

And I think that this concept that we desire to compel people to tell to and convince them of the things that we believe in is what sets up the framework that Paul is now talking about here in this chapter. It's a twofold argument that he started back in Chapter eight that we started a few weeks ago when Mike Chilcote was up here and now, he continues it in chapter nine.

And this argument is going to answer the question, what does it mean to be both compelled, yet flexible with the gospel. And we're not going to read through verses 1 through 15. We're going to break down the chapter into four sections. In verses 1 through 15, if you want to read it later for yourself, go for it. I encourage the reading of Scripture, but you're going to have to trust me for the sake of time that I'm going to sum this up in one sentence, in a few words, actually.

And this is one of those areas of Scripture where if you've ever heard Kurt say this phrase, I'm just the mailman here. It's in Scripture. I have got to talk about it. This is maybe one of those topics. And if you don't know this about Orchard Hill, the way that we teach, the way that we approach Scripture is exposition. And what that simply means is that if it's in the Bible, we're going to talk about it. We're not going to skip over, no matter how awkward or offensive or maybe insulting or hard the concept is to grasp. We're going to talk about it because we have a reverence for the Lord, a desire to know his word, and are convinced that whatever is in Scripture is profitable for us, and is beneficial as a way of reaching and speaking to us because it's God's word.

And so, I say all that to say verses 1 through 15 tell us this. Are you ready? It simply says, pay your pastors well. That's it. That's the sermon I've prepared for you guys. Have a great weekend. Enjoy the sun. No, but I'm serious. That's what it says. If you don't believe me, go look later. But there's a reason that Paul is saying this. There's a reason why Paul is making this point.

If you know who Mike Tomlin is and if you don't, he's the head coach of the Pittsburgh Steelers. And a few years ago, a famous quote that he gave, Mike Tomlin once said is that we need volunteers, not hostages. We need volunteers, not hostages. And he was referring to a few players who were no longer thinking about the team and the joy and the benefit and the privilege it is to play professional football.

And they had become more convinced and more focused on the money, the contract, the personal identity, and more about themselves and the team. And the point that Tomlin was making is the same point that Paul is making is that you want people who are passionate. You want people who are so compelled by the thing in front of them that they don't see it as just a job. They don't see it as just money. They see it as something bigger than themselves.

And that's the point that Paul is setting up here in these first 15 verses. He's got every reason from a human perspective to demand a paycheck. We know this to be true in any professional setting. When you give your life to something, when you become good at something, we pay for those services. We pay for those things. That's what we do everywhere, even with cheeseburgers.

But he also has a godly point that he could point out if you wanted to, that throughout Scripture, multiple times, God commands that this is a right to those who preach the gospel, to make their living from preaching the gospel. But Paul doesn't even go there. You see, what Paul is doing is he is saying, hey, I have the right. I actually deserve to receive my living from this. But if choosing to do that is going to cause some of you to turn away from Christ, then I will give up that freedom and that right. I don't need to. And we see this in verse 15 where Paul says, "But I have not used any of these rights."

Well, we just have to trust in this is that Paul knows and can see in this particular city, at this particular church with this group of people, in this setting, in context, Paul knows that if he were to receive payment, that might cause some people to go home. I'm not sure the motive of this guy. So, before I even hear what he has to say, I'm walking away.

And it would rob Paul of the chance to share the gospel with someone. So, he says, I'm not even going to let my profession, my right, get in the way. So, if money isn't what's compelling Paul, we have to ask the question, well, then what is it? What is so compelling to Paul that he is even willing to give up his rights, his freedoms, and what he deserves in order to still share the gospel message?

And what we see in the next breakdown verses 16 through 18 is Paul is in fact compelled by something greater, and it's a greater love. Verse 16 through 18 says this, "For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel."

So, right off the bat in verse 16, Paul says, since I am compelled to preach and woe to me, what he is setting up and is so compelled by is he's making us ask the question, what is so compelling about the Christian faith, about the gospel message?

Another way to phrase it maybe today is, what is it about Jesus, about the gospel that makes people put their faith in Him? Today we just got a chance to hear four stories of what is so compelling about Jesus in the Gospel that made them get up and get baptized. This morning, one blogger, a guy named Brant Nelson, wrote this about this text, what was this necessity so weighing upon him, talking about Paul, what was it about Paul's experience of the gospel that he would rather die than keep it to himself?

I suggest that it is the necessity of being himself in Christ. There is something gloriously self-authenticating about the gospel in a person's life. It silences the lie that there is such a thing as a merely private faith. The gospel begets the desire to express itself in our lives. For Paul, the Gospel is so compelling because of what the Gospel means to Paul personally. And if you don't know Paul's faith journey, if you don't know how he came to know Jesus, we don't have a video testimony that we could put up on the screen. But if you look at Scripture, we get a picture of his story.

We see in Acts nine that Paul meets Jesus. He encounters Jesus on the road to Damascus. And in this setting and in this story, as Paul is walking down the road or traveling down the road, all of a sudden there are bright lights and he hears Jesus, this voice says to him, I am Jesus. And then because of Jesus and the bright lights, it tells us that Paul goes completely blind. And only by a guy named Ananias coming and putting his hands on Paul in the name of Jesus and sharing the gospel message with Paul does it say that Paul receives his sight back and puts his faith and trust in Jesus. It then says that Paul goes on to hang out and spend some time with the disciples, Jesus' closest followers. And then it tells us that shortly after that we see Paul going and telling the whole city, any person he can, that Jesus is in fact the Son of God.

In Acts nine verses 21 and 22, it says this, those that we're witnessing Paul now do this, this change of heart, "All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah."

What we then learn later, if you jump into Acts 22, is more of Paul's faith journey. We get to see Paul actually give his testimony to a large group of people, and in it he says, he admits that I used to persecute Christians even to their death, that I'm the one responsible for having multiple believers arrested and thrown in prison. He says, in fact, that when I was on the road to Damascus, I was headed to punish some Christians, and he says this when Jesus stopped me and grabbed a hold of my heart. I love that analogy, that picture.

And in Acts 29, Paul recounts the details of the conversation with Ananias that aren't found in Acts nine but are here and in Acts 22. And here's what it says. This was Ananias's words to Paul; you will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And I love this part. Imagine someone saying this to you. And now what are you waiting for, he says to Paul. Get up, be baptized, wash your sins away, calling on the name of Jesus.

We see Paul's confession, his heart transformation finally comes out in Romans chapter seven, verses 18, 24, and 25. And here's what this says, verse 18. This is Paul speaking, Paul confessing, "For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature." We then see in verse 24, Paul says with the exclamation point at the end, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" And then he goes on to say, and here's the gospel message in one verse, "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Paul's life was forever changed the moment he personally met Jesus Christ. One commentator said Paul was passionately gripped at the heart by Jesus Christ at that moment, in that encounter.

This isn't what gripped Paul's heart. This isn't the gospel. Ready? God is good, you're bad, so you better try harder. You better do more. You better get your stuff figured out and fix it on your own if you want faith. That's not the gospel message. The gospel message is not you better start doing this or doing that before you're able to or before you deserve it or before you've earned it. The gospel message isn't you better start cleaning yourself up if you really want to take this seriously even. The gospel message is not at least hope that your good one day outweighs your bad and never really knowing where you stand. And the gospel message is not, hey, as long as you're better than the person on your left or your right, some of you just went, oh, thank Jesus.

That's not what the gospel is about. That's not what gripped Paul's heart. Because if this was the gospel, it would be moralistic. It would be exhausting. And it would frankly be impossible for any of us to experience and know. But the sad truth is, that there are a lot of people, myself included, at one point in my life where I thought that this was the gospel message. And it's probably why so many people think this is what

it is, eventually in their life, they walk away from it because it is way too moralistic, exhausting, and impossible.

I spent a lot of years in student ministry, and sadly, I've seen way more students walk through the motions, and show up all throughout high school, never allowing the gospel message of Jesus Christ to become personal in their hearts. And then when they walked off to college and what only remained is the knowledge that never went to their heart, when their heart's desires and their sinful nature gets the best of them, they say, well, faith isn't for me. And they walk away from the gospel.

In my short time in adult ministry, I've seen this in many conversations with men and women where they feel like they've worked so hard, that they feel like they deserve, when they look around and think it's just not happening. Why aren't I happy? Why aren't I satisfied? Because we've never allowed the gospel to become personal in our hearts. We're missing what the gospel is really all about. Because you see the gospel message that passionately gripped Paul's heart, this is what it simply is, the fact that you and I are not enough.

But the good news is that Jesus Christ is and because of God's love for you and me, He sent his son Jesus to do what we couldn't, to die on a cross and pay the price of our sins so that you and I, if we choose to believe in him, can live. This is the gospel that grabbed Paul.

This is what compels him. And don't get it twisted. The gospel message is brutally honest. It is offensive, but it's also unconditionally loving, full of grace and mercy. It's endless, and it's an invitation for all to partake in and experience regardless of your past. The gospel in itself is what brings us freedom from sin, from death, and even the opinion of others. It's what gives us hope when life trials and circumstances hit us and we don't know what to make of them.

The Gospel message, a personal encounter with Jesus, is what forever changed the life of Paul. And it's this that compels Paul to want to go tell as many people as possible. Paul is so compelled by the love of Christ that he says in verse 12 that he will not let anything get in the way of an opportunity to tell someone about Jesus even if it means forgetting His rights as a human, giving up His freedom as a believer, his profession as a preacher, his standing as a Jew, even his Roman citizenship. He says I don't care. It doesn't matter to me. I'll give it all up if it means that just one person comes to know Jesus. Paul says what matters to him and what we see in this is that deep in his heart, he knows who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for him and the freedom that comes from that.

And because of that, in light of this, Paul says to give up this right or to give up this freedom for the sake of someone coming to know Jesus, it's worth it every single time. That is what compels Paul. That's what he sets up and establishes through the first 18 verses. And as we arrive at 19 through 23, as Paul has established what is actually so compelling about the gospel message, Paul now proposes an argument that because the Gospel is in fact never changing, inflexible in its message, for those who believe in it, as Christians, because of the Gospel, it gives you and me and incredible flexibility to adapt our method for how we are going to go tell people and win as many as possible in the name of Jesus.

We see in verses 19-23, Paul says this, "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 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. 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. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

In these five verses, Paul uses the word "win" five times. He uses it five times. So, what does it mean, according to Paul, to win with people? You might not know this, but one of our Orchard Hill staff's core values is win with people. But what does that mean? Paul says this. It means how willing are you and I to identify with people who are not like you and me? Paul says to identify and win with people who don't think, don't look, don't talk, don't act, don't even believe in what you believe. How are you going to win with these people? And Paul suggests that in these verses, as long as you are within the limits of God's Word, never, ever violating God's moral law, never changing or adding to Scripture in any way, and never compromising the truth, the gospel message in itself, Paul proposes this question then.

To what extent are you as a believer, willing to serve others in order to win them for Christ? Let that sink in for a minute. One commentator about these texts said this, "His, Paul's fundamental philosophy of ministry was to discover the method which combined the greatest integrity with the greatest impact. Paul is simply not concerned about his rights by thus freely ignoring his rights, he is actually celebrating his freedom found in Jesus Christ."

And similar to Paul's view on winning people by any means, in verse 19. Martin Luther once said, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, subject to all." But before Martin Luther and

before Paul, Jesus Christ himself modeled and mentioned this very style of flexible ministry.

We see it in chapter ten of Mark verses 43 through 45, where Jesus himself said, his, "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Paul's identity and salvation. If you are a believer in Christ your identity and salvation have been securely and firmly placed at the foot of the cross of Jesus. And because of this, the freedom that comes from that reality, we can become, Paul becomes, flexible. David Pryor, the same commentator that I mentioned earlier, continued to say this, "Everything was no longer of his. Paul's very being. Paul's identity was now in Christ, and this allowed Paul to adopt or discard at will to win others for Christ. Paul, because of Christ, becomes," and I love this picture, "a versatile chameleon, never locking into any one way of operating and always listening to God's idea in each new situation."

As Christians, as believers, as a church, do we think this way? Do we believe this? Are we ready to become Christian chameleons to win people with the gospel message that has transformed our hearts and our lives and bring that good news to other people in any way, shape, or form, no matter what it may or may not cost us and what we may or may not have to give up? If so, we must do everything short of sin not to create needless offenses or allow cultural differences or even our own personal opinions about things to get in the way and maybe cause a person to turn away from an opportunity to hear the gospel changing news of Jesus Christ.

I couldn't omit this when I saw it, so I'm including it. David Jackman, when he talks about these verses, says this, "Suddenly the weak brother of chapter eight, whose conscience could so easily be compromised by an unloving use of personal freedom, eating meat sacrificed to idols is back in the frame. Rather than asserting his freedom, the gospel slave, in this case, Paul, is prepared to sacrifice his rights so as to win over the scrupulous and not cause him to stumble. The principle of cross-shaped spirituality is therefore at the heart of all real ministry. This is a sign that the Gospel has truly gripped the heart of a person. The salvation of as many as possible becomes the dominating concern of both life and lip. And as a result, all the personal daily life decisions we now make as believers because of who Jesus is are arrived at on a new basis. How will this, whatever this is for you, how will this affect the progress of the Gospel? Will this or that make it easier or harder for others to hear, to believe, and to be saved?"

I believe this is what sets Orchard Hill up to be somewhat of a unique church. I mentioned earlier that the essence of our mission statement hasn't changed since 1989, to help people find and follow, the wording has changed over the years, but the essence is still there to help people find and follow Jesus. And our vision statement has been the same too. Our vision statement has always been to be a church that is theologically pure yet culturally relevant. And what this simply means is that Orchard Hill is never going to allow the culture of today to change or alter the gospel message in any way. But as a church, we have the freedom when needed to change or alter how we are going to reach the culture within an unchanging gospel message of a greater love for you and for me.

I think back when Covid all started and everything got shut down and we had to figure out as a church, how we were going to change and adapt and continue to reach and share the good news with people. I think about it as KidsFest gets ready to start next month. Over the years, over the decades, the ways that KidsFest has adapted and changed because we so badly want to invest and love the next generation and raise them to believe in Jesus however we can reach a community. I think about how we're getting ready to introduce this new concept here at Orchard Hill in our group settings of offering special interest groups where we use the things that God has given us a passion for, to draw people together, to come together around that shared interest with a hope and an opportunity that God opportunities and conversations can happen, and the Gospel can be shared in any way, shape or form.

I think of how crazy of an idea it was to rent a camp in the middle of winter, and then bring 250 middle school students. We were out of our minds. We had no idea it was so much work. It was so much chaos, it was so smelly, but I had no idea that that girl was going to get up and say, because of that, she met the Lord. And I think of her leader, the one who gave up a weekend to hang out in a cabin full of 12-year-old girls. And what that meant and what she had to experience, what she had to listen to, what she had to go through that I know included getting shot with paintballs all for the sake of the gospel so that even just one girl would give her life to Jesus.

That's what Paul is talking about here. He's saying it's worth it. And at the end of chapter nine, verses 24 through 27, Paul begins to use sports analogies, and now he's speaking my language. And in it, Paul says, "is, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

Now, I'm going to sum this up really quickly. This is what Paul means. The city of Corinth hosted the Athenian games every two years, and it was similar to the Olympics. So, in this city, if you were raised and born in Corinth, you knew firsthand witness accounts. You saw athletes training and disciplining their bodies for months to prepare for this potential moment of glory. And Paul says, just like those athletes train their bodies and develop self-discipline, if you really want to become flexible with the gospel, you've got to train yourself up in Christ. You've got to learn to attack your sin, hate your sin, and fight against your natural, sinful desires because they're going to come up when we're trying to love people in the name of Jesus. But he says, do it. It's worth it. Invest in Christ. I love that part.

And as we wrap up, here's the challenge that Paul was facing. His original readers, the church in Corinth, were going to do one of two things. They were either going to sacrificially give up in the name of Jesus their rights and freedoms, or they were going to continue to live for themselves. Caring, not at all about those around them. Or, they were going to say for Jesus, we'll give up whatever it takes because it's worth it.

I think that's the same challenge that you and I as a church and as believers, as people sitting right here today face this challenge, is what leads us back to the big question of what does it mean to be both compelled yet flexible with the gospel? And according to Paul, here's what it means. Here's our answer to hold as tightly as we can to the truth of the gospel message, who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us and what that means, and the freedom that we get from that. And in doing so, be able to then hold as loosely as we need to, maybe even have to let go of at times our freedoms and rights in order to win as many people as possible.

Another way to simply say it is to remain theologically pure, yet always culturally relevant. That's going to require us to discipline our bodies in the name of Jesus. But it's worth it. It's worth it because don't forget, Jesus ran out of heaven for you and disciplined His body so that you would have life. This is what it means to be compelled and flexible with the Gospel.

Let's pray. Father thank you. Thank you for your son. Thank you for wanting us to know you so badly that you will do anything short of sin to reach us. I pray that at this moment that sinks into our hearts and it begins to transform us in such a way that we begin to say, how can we not go tell what we know to be true now, today? That we are loved by you and in you is life. We ask this in your precious name. Amen. Have a great day.