Text: I Corinthians 9:1-23; 10:31-33
Title: "High Definition Living … Self-Denial"

PRAYER

ILLUSTRATION – Dan and Janet Reed and their three sons have been very active in our church for years. A few weeks ago, Janet's mother passed away after a lengthy illness. As Janet and her family were sorting out her mother's things they came across something that Janet's mom had written several years before … just a month after her husband, Janet's dad, was killed, and a few months before Dan and Janet got married. Written on a piece of paper were three resolutions:

> I RESOLVE NOT TO BUG MY KIDS ABOUT MY PROBLEMS.
>
> I RESOLVE TO KEEP MYSELF PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY ATTRACTIVE.
>
> I RESOLVE TO MAKE A LIFE FOR MYSELF THAT IS FULFILLING, SERVES OTHERS, AND HONORS CHRIST.
>
> And she signed and dated it.

I think Janet's mom understood what we've been talking about over the last few weeks … High Definition Living. We're talking about a way of life that honors and glorifies God. Turn with me to I Corinthians 10:31.

> NOTE: I've challenged us to memorize this verse. And the boys and girls have done great. I had quite a line of children ready last week to recite this verse for me. And if you missed out last week and want to come to me in the foyer, I have a little gift for you. So let's read or recite the verse together today.

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV)

The human author of this book of the Bible was the Apostle Paul. The church at Corinth had written Paul a letter about some disputed matters in their church, and much of the letter of I Corinthians contains Paul's Spirit-inspired response to those questions. And the question related to just how engaged should God's people be in the world in questionable things. Should we socialize with people who have left God out of their lives? And if so, just how far do we go into their world? Are we free to do whatever they do?

> Well, High Definition Living means that I ask this question of everything I do: What brings the maximum glory to God?

Now the Bible goes on to say that essentially I bring glory to God by doing, not what pleases me, but what helps other people.

1 Corinthians 10:32-33 (NIV) - Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— [33] even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

There are two things that really glorify God. When we live our lives to:

- Edify other believers (help them to grow in Christ)
- Evangelize non-believers (help them to come to Christ)

And that's what we find in this section. Now we saw last week how to best display the glory of God in my everyday life…

1. I LIMIT MY <u>SOCIAL</u> LIBERTY IN ORDER TO BETTER <u>BUILD</u> <u>UP</u> OTHER BELIEVERS (I Corinthians 8).

In Chapter 8 Paul set out the limits of Christian liberty, limits that are to be determined by brotherly love, by concern for the welfare of fellow Christians. He summarizes the principle in v.9.

1 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV) - Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

Remember, all this revolved around a practice that was very common in the NT culture … eating meat that had been offered as a sacrifice to a pagan god or goddess. Some Christians thought it was fine because those gods really don't exists, and besides Christians are free from the dietary restrictions that are found in the OT. However, some weren't there yet. They were fresh out of paganism, and these practices offended them.

So we are challenged that in the gray areas of living, those that involved practices about which the Bible does not speak, we are free to do what our consciences tell us to do. But we must put all of that under the control of love. And if the exercise of my freedom, my rights offends another believer, and keeps them from growing as they should, that settles it. I will not participate in that activity. Our rights end when another person is offended.

So in order to edify other believers I limit my social liberties. And this brings glory to God. But there's another way we bring glory to God:

2. I <u>MODIFY</u> MY ENTIRE <u>LIFESTYLE</u> IN ORDER TO <u>WITNESS</u> TO NON-BELIEVERS (I Corinthians 9).

In I Corinthians 9 the Paul illustrates how he followed this principle in his own life in something that was totally unrelated to eating meet sacrificed to idols.

Most of I Corinthians 9 is taken up with an example that Paul uses from his own personal life and ministry. He has the right to a certain standard of living as an apostle. But he has limited that freedom (right) in order to make his ministry more effective. That's the main goal … more effective ministry.

High Definition Living means that not only will I limit my own rights in any way necessary in order to build up other believers, I will also modify my entire lifestyle in order to witness to non-believers, helping them come to Christ. And through this the glory of God is more clearly, more vividly seen by others.

Now I want to show you two ways we modify our lives in order to win as many people as possible to Jesus Christ.

HOW? I MAKE FINANCIAL SACRIFICES (vv.1-18)

EXPLANATION: Paul was the Rodney Daingerfield of the apostles … he got no respect, particularly among the Corinthians. You get the impression by reading I and II Corinthians that they never really accepted or respected Paul as an apostle, a genuine minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And one of the rights of apostleship included the right to be cared for financially by those to whom they minister.

In these verses Paul gives five reasons he has the right to be supported by those to whom he ministered:

First, he was an apostle.

> **1 Corinthians 9:1 (NIV) - Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?**

Second, it was a commonly accepted practice.

> **1 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV) - 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?**

Third, it was God's law.

> **1 Corinthians 9:9 (NIV) - 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?**

Fourth, other ministers had this privilege.

> **1 Corinthians 9:12a (NIV) - If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?**

Fifth, Jesus taught it.

> **1 Corinthians 9:14 (NIV) - In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.**

Let me just stop here and say in behalf of our entire ministry staff, and the support staff, we thank you for taking care of our financial needs. Because through the ministry budget of our church, you provide a salary and benefits for us, you are freeing us to not have to work at another job, so we can give ourselves full-time to the work of the Lord. We thank you so very much!

And Paul had this right to this support in Corinth. Now we're not told here in the text why this was so controversial in Corinth. But something happened that caused Paul to think twice about accepting this support. Maybe the Corinthians looked at Paul like they looked at those traveling philosophers who were in and out of Corinth like celebrities. Maybe they thought paying Paul was like paying for the entertainment of a star speaker who came to town. Maybe they balked at supporting Paul because they thought he was doing it for money, like those celebrities who came to speak in the stadium in Corinth.

Whatever happened, Paul had decided that in order to not create any roadblock or hindrance for the Gospel, he would do something that was virtually unheard of … he would not accept support from the Corinthians. Look at it in …

> **1 Corinthians 9:12b (NIV) - We did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.**
>
> **1 Corinthians 9:15 (NIV) - I have not used any of these rights.**
>
> **1 Corinthians 9:18 (NIV) - What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.**

So here's the point in all of this: To glorify God in high definition in my life I have to think about the ways that I can modify my life so others can know Christ. Nothing is more central to our lives than our finances. It's a huge area in our lives. We're concerned about it. Do we have enough money to pay our bills, or to get this new thing or that new thing? Will I have enough to retire on?

> Somewhere in all of that, we have to also ask, "Am I making any sacrifices financially so others have a better chance of coming to faith in Jesus Christ?"

And as Paul asked that question, he came to the conclusion that he would not claim his rights to a certain standard of living, but would modify his life so he could better witness for Christ.

ILLUSTRATION – Lottie Moon is a name that many of us as Southern Baptists have heard for years. She was an example of this very lifestyle I'm talking about. Lottie was born to a privileged Virginia family. She once described herself as "overindulged and under-disciplined." Her family valued education in an era when few women had opportunities for higher education. Lottie's sister went on to become a physician. Lottie earned bachelors and masters degrees, becoming a school teacher, then an assistant principal. So Lottie was wealthy and educated, and had a measure of status. She could have lived a life of extravagance, but she chose a different course.

> God called Lottie Moon to go as a missionary to China. She left here comfortable lifestyle and, at the age of 33, entered a world of poverty in China. Lottie could have spent her life

wearing elegant gowns and relaxing in her family home in Virginia. Instead she wore Chinese clothing and became more concerned for reaching the lost than about impressing other with her lavish lifestyle.

Lottie left China for her furlough, and when she returned, she found her adopted land had been ripped apart by war. People were starving all around her. She wrote home begging for money and resources, but the mission board was so heavily in debt it could do nothing. Missionaries on the field were asked to take voluntary pay cuts. Lottie shared her food and resources with the Chinese people. She often went without meals so others could eat.

Soon it began to take a toll on Lottie. Her physical and mental health declined. Her weight dropped to 50 pounds, but still she sacrificed for the people she loved. In 1912 some of her fellow missionaries arranged for Lottie to return to the US. Lottie would never see her earthly homeland again. She died aboard the ship heading home.

Lottie once wrote: "I wonder how many of us really believe that it is more blessed to give than receive. A woman who accepts that statement of our Lord Jesus Christ as a fact and not as 'impractical idealism,' will make giving a principle of her life."

She went on to observe how many people believe that "Jesus paid it all" and so they need not pay anything, forgetting that the prime object of their salvation was that they should follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ."

So how do I modify my life in order to give others the best possible opportunity to hear the Gospel and be saved? Well, for one, I make financial sacrifices.

HOW? I LIVE OUT THE GOSPEL IN EVERY RELATIONSHIP (vv.19-23)

Look at …

1 Corinthians 9:19 (NIV) - Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to <u>everyone</u>, to win as many as possible.

The word for "slave" there is a powerful word. The word was the word used of Israelites 400 years of bondage in Egypt where they had to work hard for someone else.

Mark 10:44 (NIV) - Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

It wasn't forced on him. He did it willfully to himself.

Now this is amazing. As Paul looked around him in the traffic pattern of his life he basically encountered three different kinds of people.

First, he saw Jewish people.

1 Corinthians 9:20 (NIV) - 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.

Now these were Paul's people. People like himself. He said elsewhere that he would gladly go to hell, if in so doing his fellow Jews could be saved. He said, "My hearts desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved."

Second, he saw non-Jewish people (Gentiles, like most of us).

1 Corinthians 9:21 (NIV) - 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.

What do we do? We take a step in their direction. We get out of their faces and into their shoes.

Third, he saw "weak" persons.

1 Corinthians 9:22a (NIV) - To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.

Who are these persons who are "weak"? Probably they are people whose understanding is weak; they have trouble grasping the truths of the Gospel. So we get down on their level. We start where they are.

1 Corinthians 9:22b-23a (NIV) - I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel…"

Now, I can just imagine that some of you out there are thinking like this: "Yeah, OK, that's great for preacher types." But wait, is it? Are these modifications just for the people who paid to do it? No, look at 11:1. This verse may better be included in with Chapter 10.

1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV) - Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Just think about Jesus. Think about how he modified His life in order to bring glory to the Father by helping the lost get saved. He stepped out of heaven and became one with us.

CONCLUSION

Big questions:

- Do you believe that people who are not Christians are in great peril for eternity?
- Do you believe that God made a way for the lost to be saved through Jesus Christ?
- Do you believe that it is God's will for believers to be actively involved in people coming to Christ?

- How have you modified your lifestyle in order to help the lost come to Christ?

Mark 8:34-35 (NIV) - Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [35] For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, <u>but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it</u>.