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A1229 – July 8, 2012 – 1 Corinthians 9:15-23
Conceding Rights For The Salvation Of Others

Let's turn back to 1 Cor 9. I was out last week so we want to pick up where we left off two weeks ago. Chapter 9 is sandwiched between chapters 8 and 10 where Paul is addressing the situation at Corinth, eating meat sacrificed to idols in the pagan temples. Chapter 9 is placed in the center to give us the central principle which is: all believers, by virtue of being believers, have certain rights, certain freedoms, however these rights should at times be forfeited for the sake of others. The issue at Corinth was the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, some believers could eat the meat because they knew there was no such thing as an idol, there was but one God, however, others did not have this knowledge and therefore if they ate it would be sin. So those who could eat should not eat for the sake of their weaker brethren. Or in our day it may be drinking alcohol, you shouldn't get drunk but you can partake of a small amount of alcohol, that's your right, however, you should not exercise that right if there's a weaker brother around who thinks it's wrong to drink and if you do then the weaker brother's conscience is strengthened to drink and you cause him to sin and this damages the ability of his conscience to convict him of sin. And that's not loving your brother for whom Christ died. That's not building up your brother, that's tearing him down.

So the principle is simply that you have rights but you should at times forfeit those rights for the sake of others. In chapter 9 Paul is illustrating this principle from the standpoint of his apostleship. Paul was an apostle and he had the rights of an apostle. Most of 9:4-14 are some of Paul's rights as an apostle. And the basic right he's highlighting is the one given by our Lord in Luke 10 which is repeated here by Paul in verse 14, "the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." Paul had every right to financial support from his converts. However, verse 15, **I have used none of these things**, none of these rights and you can single out all the

various rights he's referring to by going through vv 4-14; financial support in general (v 4), taking along a believing wife and financially supporting her (v 5), a right to refrain from working (v 6), a right to provisions (v 7), a share (vv 8-10), material things (v 11) and a living (v 14). We might simplify the whole list to just "total support," Paul had the right to everything and anything that he might need to live. **But** he says in verse 15, **I have used none of these things.**

The big question is "Why?" Why didn't Paul exercise his apostolic rights? Some people at Corinth thought it was because he really wasn't an apostle. But that wasn't the reason at all. Actually there are several reasons Paul didn't exercise his apostolic rights and we went through several of those last time. Just by way of review. At Thessalonica Paul forfeited his right to financial support and made tents because there was a lazy group of believers and he wanted to be an example of hard labor to those lazy believers. At Ephesus Paul forfeited his rights to financial support and made tents so he could have enough to give to others because the Lord said, it's more blessed to give than receive. And at Corinth Paul forfeited his rights to financial support and made tents because there were false apostles counterfeiting the apostolic office and this was hindering the progress of the gospel, something Paul would never do. So Paul shows us that the basic principle is just because you have rights doesn't mean you should exercise your rights. For the gospel you should forsake all your rights.

Today in 9:15-23 we come to a controversial text, probably no text about Paul has confused people more than these verses. What confuses them is down in vv 20, 21 and 22 where Paul says to Jews I became as a Jew, to Gentiles I became as a Gentile, etc...etc...that I might save some. So when it came to the gospel and the salvation of others according to that gospel Paul would forego his rights and act like these other groups, act according to their conscience so the gospel would not be hindered in any way by secondary issues. Then in vv 24-27 he's going to explain how this is part of running the Christian race, part of trying to win the prize and receiving rewards at the judgment seat of Christ. Then in chapter 10 he's going to warn us about getting disqualified from the race and not receiving rewards at the judgment seat of Christ. So the issue of conceding rights for the sake of others impacts reward status, that's the eschatological dimension of where this study is

going; it will affect your rewards status in the millennial kingdom and the new heaven and new earth.

Let's work up to it starting in verse 15, **But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case**, in other words this isn't a veiled request for financial support. People sometimes try to get something out of you in an indirect way just in a conversation and you can tell when they do that and I can't stand it when they do that. I wish they'd just come out with it. But no, they try to make you feel guilty about it. Try to use guilt as a motivator and I just want to pop them one because I think they're being manipulative. Paul says **I am not** doing that, I'm not trying to lay a guilt trip on you so you'll start providing me with financial support.

Paul would never do that. Why not? Middle of verse 15, **for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one**. Paul liked to boast about something. Paul was a boaster and there are certain things it's completely legitimate to boast about. What was Paul boasting about? The fact that he was not exercising his apostolic rights, that he was not making a living by the gospel. And anytime you sacrifice a right you have a justifiable reason to boast about it. That's fully legitimate. Paul was completely justified in boasting that he preached the gospel without charge. And to see verification that he did boast about this and would continue to boast in this turn to 2 Cor 11.

This is a year or so later. 1 Cor was written in AD56 and 2 Cor in AD57. He's a lot happier with the Corinthians in this second letter than he was in the first. Notice 2 Cor 11:7, "Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?" That was his boast, nanny nanny boo boo, at Corinth I preach the gospel for freeeee! And he stuck out his tongue and wagged his head at Satan and said ppppllllll! I'll show you he's messing with Satan here. He's mocking Satan. Verse 8, "I robbed other churches by taking wages *from them* to serve you;" that refers to the funds he received from the church at Philippi while he was at Corinth. Verse 9, "and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so." I'm not asking for funds from you

guys. “As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.” You won’t stop it, if I take funds from you it will be stopped, but I’m not taking funds, so it won’t stop. Verse 11, “Why? Because I do not love you? God knows *I do!*”¹² But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.” Whose he talking about? Some other people boasting? Who were they? Verse 13, false apostles, these guys knew that the apostles made a living by the gospel so they counterfeited the apostles and started accepting funds around Corinth. As verse 13 reads, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.” Paul gives divine analysis in verse 14, it’s “No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.” Paul picked up on the Satanic program here to counterfeit the apostolic office by raising up some of his servants to go around and act like they were apostles, take funds from Christians, like a lot of false teachers do today. Satan still has many pulpits filled with his servants that are misleading Christians and taking their money and don’t you be taken in by them. They’re a dime a dozen. You keep your nose in this book and you keep taking in content Bible teaching. They are nothing more than impostors whose end will be according to their deeds! They had that in the 1st century too so to counter it Paul said, I’m not going to accept funds, I preach the gospel without charge, now, what are you going to do about that Satan? So that’s why I say he was sticking his tongue out at Satan, that was his boast. Paul was pretty bold. So the big point is that Paul was able to boast at Corinth in the fact that he was preaching the gospel without charge, forfeiting his right, and Paul would rather die than have his boast made empty because that would give Satan a victory.

Returning to 1 Cor 9, let’s move to verse 16. While Paul could justifiably boast that he preached the gospel without charge he could not boast about preaching the gospel itself. Verse 16 explains why? **For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of**, and then he lists two reasons why. Reason one, **for I am under** compulsion, I am under pressure to preach the gospel, it is incumbent upon me to preach the gospel. And reason two, related to reason one, **for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel**. I’m going to be in big trouble with the Lord if I don’t preach the gospel. So the two reasons go back to Paul’s commission on the Damascus Road, the Lord commissioned

Paul to preach before Gentiles, kings, the sons of Israel and to suffer for Christ's sake. It was God's will for Paul's life to preach the gospel and suffer and if Paul didn't do it then he'd be in big trouble with the Lord, **woe is me**. The word **woe** is a Hebrew loanword and it meant "death," death to me if I do not preach the gospel. The Lord would have struck Paul down if he didn't preach the gospel. He had to do it; it was preach the gospel or death.

So Paul could not boast in preaching the gospel. He was called by God to preach the gospel and would that every preacher in the pulpits across the world this morning had a real call to preach the gospel. If someone doesn't have the call they shouldn't be in the pulpit. And if someone does have the call they better be in the pulpit. Just one month ago I was tired, I was frustrated; I started looking at some other jobs because I thought maybe the answer was to leave the pastorate and go do something else. Don't look at me funny, you've been tired too. I came across a fine job description, I was overqualified in several areas, it was a good job with good pay in a great town, but I almost got sick when I got through reading the job description, absolutely sick. I literally had a physical reaction to it because there's no way I could give up what I have in the pastorate for anything else. And the Lord got my attention again, there's nothing else I can do but pastor and teach the word of God, nothing. And so all I could do was say thank you Lord for the gracious reminder of how good it is to be tired and frustrated. The answer is not to get out of the pastorate, I can't do anything else. I'm stuck for life, I didn't choose to preach the gospel, I was called to preach the gospel and all I have to do is keep running that race. It was the same with the apostle Paul and I only wish that all pastors filling pulpits across the world today could do nothing but preach the gospel, but I fear most do not. And in that case they shouldn't be there! If you don't have the attitude of Paul in verse 16, death to me if I do not preach the gospel then you shouldn't be in the pulpit.

Verse 17, **For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. 18What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.** The argument is not altogether clear but what is clear is that Paul *did* preach the gospel **voluntarily** because verse 18 says my reward is **preaching the gospel without charge**. Now that might not sound like much of a reward to you, but Paul thought preaching the gospel without pay was a reward and

we'll understand that more when he gets into the rewards issue in vv 24-27. But for now he's content to say I voluntarily preached the gospel without charge and this is my reward, I laid aside my full use of his right in the gospel.

Verse 19, **For though I am free from all men**, strike out **though**, that's not in the original text and it's misleading. Really the way it reads is this, **For I am free from all, to all I enslaved myself**. Look at that and let it sink in because it makes a lot of common sense. If you go in and receive financial support from someone then you're not free from them, there are natural obligations put upon you, natural restraints. Maybe they give you some money and you sense the obligation to give them special attention, go to their party or something. Paul is saying I'm free from all of that because I didn't accept financial support from any of you. I'm a free man. And being free enabled him to freely make himself a slave to all.

Now the rest of the passage is about that expression **to all I enslaved myself**, it's an explication of that expression, to the Jew, to the Gentile, etc...and the purpose of it all is at the end of verse 19, **so that I may win more** and at the end of verse 22, **so that I might save some**. So the winning more is winning them to salvation. Paul became the slave of all in order that he might save some.

Now what this means fundamentally is that Paul forfeited his own rights so that others might not suffer any hindrance to the gospel message. However, by doing this he has confused a lot of Christians. It's this policy that Paul articulates here in vv 20, 21 and 22 that has thrown everybody. This policy led to a number of questionable activities and we're going to look at four of them.

So let's look at the policy. Verse 20, **To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews, to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; 21to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. 22To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.** The

problem there is the **all** things. What do you mean Paul you became **all things to all men**? You'd think Paul would want them to become like him. But that's not the strategy. The strategy is for Paul to become like these other groups, to behave like Jews in certain cultural contexts, to behave like Gentile proselytes to Judaism and God-fearers in certain cultural contexts and to behave like Gentiles in certain cultural contexts, even though he doesn't have to do this; he's giving up his own freedoms in order to win them to Jesus Christ.

We're going to see Paul make a number of cultural concessions in the Book of Acts in order to reach people for the gospel. And these concessions are precisely the reason a number of theologians all clobber Paul for these. Oh Paul, you screwed up, you violated grace, oh Paul, you shouldn't have done that! Now, was Paul wrong to make these concessions? Apparently Paul didn't have a problem with it. To the Jews he became a Jew, to those under Law as those under Law, to those not under Law as not under Law. Paul was all things to all men, so that he might by all means save some. So Paul saw no problem with the concessions he made in the Book of Acts.

Let's ease our way into this, I'll take you to Acts 18:18 first and this is an illustration of verse 20, **to the Jews I became a Jew**. The interesting thing is this is mentioned right as he's leaving Corinth. He'd been there more than a year and a half, now he's leaving, verse 18, **Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow**. He's taking a ship from the port near Corinth called **Cenchrea** back to **Syria** so he can report back to the church at Antioch. And there's this strange note put in the text. Paul got a haircut Why? Was he meeting his girlfriend for dinner? No, **he was keeping a vow**. Well, what is a vow? A vow is a promise to God; it goes back to Numbers 6, the Nazirite vow, and they were very serious, it's on the level of the marriage vow, so it's legally binding, you enter it willfully but once you've entered it it's legally binding until it's been fulfilled. The reason people would take them was they got in a jam and they wanted out, they wanted help, so they'd say, alright God, if you'll get me out of this jam then I'll do such and such and then you'd be released from the vow. Maybe it was a pressure situation, maybe business was bad, maybe the marriage was sour, maybe you were being persecuted, in any case, something was wrong and so they'd make

these vows. That's what Martin Luther did when he was caught out in one of the worst thunderstorms of the 16th century in Germany and he said, Lord, if you get me out of this alive I vow to be a monk. God got him out and he became a monk. God had other plans for the monk; he became the great propagator of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. But that's the idea of a vow. Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit thought it was significant that Paul took a vow. And this bothers people because this was part of the Law of Moses. And why Paul are you putting yourself back under the Law of Moses when Christ fulfilled the Law of Moses? Why are you being legalistic? Why are you rejecting grace? Don't you know that law can't affect anything?

Why did Paul take a Nazirite vow? It was a voluntary vow, probably because he was in a jam and he wanted the Lord's help. It appears that Paul made the vow while he was at Corinth because in verse 9 you can see Paul's life was in danger, so maybe he took the vow so God would protect his life and now that he's safely out of Corinth, he's leaving from Cenchrea, he gets his hair cut, which terminates the vow. God has kept him safe, the vow is over.

Now I would submit to you that a Christian can put himself under parts of the Law of Moses if he wants to, he is free to do that. He's also free not to do that. It's an area of personal freedom. As long as he understands the Law of Moses can't sanctify you and can't justify you. But if you want to keep parts of it, you're free to do so. And Paul did that at Corinth. Christians say you're wrong Paul. Paul was not wrong. Paul was free to do it if he wanted to.

Turn to another one in Acts 16, this one is a little more substantial and I'm suggesting that all of these are to be understood in terms of the principle Paul set forth in 1 Cor 9, to the Jews I became a Jew, to those under Law as those under Law, etc...Acts 16:1, "Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, ²and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." Uh oh Paul, you just blew it, you just compromised the gospel, why did you have Timothy circumcised and violate grace? Didn't you say in Galatians if you get circumcised you might as well cut the whole thing off? No, because this is a

concession for the sake of Jews. Here we have Timothy, Timothy's mother was Jewish but his father was Greek and this was well known in the region. So what did Paul do? He had Timothy circumcised. Why? So they could evangelize Jews. Otherwise Timothy could not have gone with them to evangelize Jews. The practice of 1st century Judaism was in the case where a Jewish woman married a Gentile man, the sons that came out of that marriage, like Timothy, had to make the decision when they grew up, whether they wanted to be identified with Jews or with the Gentiles. And if he was circumcised then he was accepted as a Jew among the Jews, if not he remained a Gentile. Timothy got circumcised to open up opportunities to evangelize Jews. To the Jew I became a Jew! And apparently Timothy did too. So I don't think Paul did anything wrong having Timothy circumcised. Paul knew and Timothy knew that circumcision didn't justify you or sanctify you. It was simply done for the sake of the gospel going to Jews.

So we have a principle starting to develop that while the Christian is free from the Law he's also free to keep parts of the Law, understanding that keeping the Law has no role whatsoever in justification or sanctification, but if it can help spread the gospel to someone, hey, why not? What's more important? You're freedom from the Law of Moses or this person's salvation? Obviously, since you know the Law of Moses is not efficacious for any merit before God, you should put yourself under the Law for the sake of this person's salvation. There's no reason to let that hinder the spread of the gospel.

Third, turn to Acts 20:6. Here's a third case where people say Paul made a boo-boo. Here Paul is at Philippi and what's does Luke say? "We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread," Why did they wait till after the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Because Paul kept the Feasts. That's another feature of the Law of Moses. Drop down to verse 16, here we see Paul again, this time in a hurry. Why? "to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost." Another Jewish Feast day. Now why do you think Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem on that day? Apart from just keeping the feast what's the Jewish population in Jerusalem during a feast? It would swell to more than a million. So does that give Paul some opportunities for Jewish evangelism? Big crowds, big opportunities. To the Jew I became a Jew.

Now let's turn to the most controversial one, Acts 21. In this one the report is out that Paul was telling Jews of the Diaspora, who lived out in the Gentile world, not to keep the Law of Moses and not to circumcise their kids. And this is causing a problem. And this is pointing up something that's simply unavoidable if you follow this principle Paul followed. So before we look at this one look at the problem this can create. On one hand if you become as one not under Law in the sight of those who are under the Law then those under the Law will be offended! But on the other hand, if you become as one under the Law in the sight of those not under the Law, those who have Christian freedom, then those not under the Law may be confused! Just read the commentaries and you'll see people are confused. I mean, what would you think if you saw Paul on Monday keeping the Law, eating kosher, and on Tuesday he's eating pork? You have to admit that this could be very confusing. Are we or are we not under the Law Paul? Why is your life inconsistent Paul. But if you conclude that you're only thinking on the surface. Paul is not inconsistent at all when you realize that his consistency is to the free grace gospel and not to the issue of the Law. The Law Paul can take it or leave it. It does nothing. But if Paul has to keep a Law not to offend some Jews so he can get a gospel hearing, why not?

So let's look at this one, let me try to encapsulate the problem for you. Notice what James says in v 20, we've got **thousands of Jews who have believed** and that word **thousands** is *myriads*, but myriad means "tens of thousands" and so at minimum we have twenty thousand Jewish believers running around Jerusalem. You say, what, are you kidding me, twenty thousand? Yeah, and that's minimum. Over twenty thousand Jewish believers **and**, get this, **they are all zealous for the Law**. So that describes the particular kind of believers we are talking about. Jewish believers zealous for the Law of Moses. And notice what's causing the problem in verse 21. What is Paul teaching **all the Jews? To forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs**. And the **customs** there is sort of a catch-all to say Paul's teaching against the whole Jewish way of life. Are these true accusations? Had Paul indeed taught these things?

First of all, did Paul teach Jews **to forsake Moses**? It could be interpreted that way because Paul taught that Moses couldn't accomplish what Christ could accomplish. Keeping the Law of Moses could not justify but faith in

Christ could justify. So there is a sense in which Paul taught Jews to forsake Moses, in the sense that keeping the Law couldn't justify. It couldn't sanctify for that matter either. But Paul never taught that voluntarily keeping the Law of Moses for non-meritorious reasons should never be done. In fact, Paul kept some of the Law of Moses at times. He made vows, he kept the feasts. So in a way he did teach to forsake Moses, in the sense that we forsake Moses as a way of justification or sanctification, but in another way, he did not teach to forsake Moses, if you wanted to voluntarily put yourself under the Law for the sake of saving Jews. To the Jew I became a Jew.

Let's take up the second charge, did Paul tell Jews **not to circumcise their children**? Again, it could be interpreted that way because Paul taught that Abraham was justified by faith alone before he was circumcised. So getting circumcised could not justify you but faith could justify you. But Paul never taught that you might want to get circumcised to be justified or to be sanctified, Paul only taught that you might want to get circumcised for cultural reasons so you could get closer to Jews for evangelism. That's what he did with Timothy, had him circumcised to open doors for evangelizing Jews. So again, in a way you could think that Paul taught Jews not to circumcise their children but in a way he did not teach that. The bottom line in Paul is faith in Christ is what justifies, not keeping the Law of Moses, circumcision is neither here nor there.

And lastly, did Paul teach the Jews **not to walk according to the customs**? And like we said, the **customs** there is sort of a catch-all to say Paul taught against the whole Jewish way of life. And you could see how they would conclude that.

So with those charges leveled at Paul you can see that the principle of Paul, to consistently set aside his own freedom and adhere to the cultural customs of Jews or Gentiles, for the sake of the gospel, was frequently misunderstood. So recap, about twenty-thousand Jewish believers are charging Paul with teaching Jews to forsake the Law of Moses and not circumcise their children. That one was too hot to handle so the Jerusalem elders throw it on Paul. Verse 22, **“What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.** You gotta do something Paul, you can't hide out, they're going to find out you're here. Verse 23, **“Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24take them and purify yourself**

along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. So in other words, Paul, we don't believe you are teaching this so go do this and that will put the whole thing to rest. You see again the vow, there are **four men who were under a vow**, we've seen Paul under a vow before. Does Paul have a problem keeping a vow? No, no problem, they were voluntary vows, they were temporary and when they expired you would go down to the Temple with your sacrifices to be released from the vow. But before you could go into the Temple with your sacrifices you had to be purified and so these four men are going to have to be purified. Paul is not under the vow but he's been out of the land of Israel and any Jew who left the land of Israel was considered unclean because he'd been out among the Gentiles. So Paul can't go into the Temple area without purification, they say, go with these four and get purified with them and do something else, verse 24, **pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads;**ⁱ and that was expensive, he had to buy a lot of animals for the sacrifices, he had to buy it for each of the four men. So what would this prove? That Paul walked **orderly; keeping the Law** of Moses. There would be no question if he did this. In v 26 Paul does it. And everyone says, oh Paul, what are you doing here? The great apostle of grace just violated grace. You taught that the Law of Moses couldn't justify or sanctify, but you took vows, you taught that circumcision can't justify or sanctify, but you had Timothy circumcised. Now you're going to undergo this purification, take another vow, pay the expenses of four other men down at the Temple. Why are you doing this?

Hey, as the stronger brother he is not going to violate these weaker brother's consciences. He's simply going to go through it so as not to offend. He knows he's not required to do it. He knows he's not under the Law of Moses. But, for the sake of his brethren who are sensitive to this, he does it. He did not violate grace because it's the same principle as 1 Cor 9:20-22, to the Jew I became as a Jew, to the one under the Law as one under the Law, to the one without the Law as one without the Law, I became all things to all men that I might save some.

Let me summarize what I think the word of God is teaching. On one hand, for a Jewish believer it is not necessary to obey the Law of Moses but it is

permissible to obey the Law of Moses. As long as a Jewish believer does not obey the Law to be justified or to be sanctified he has the freedom to follow it. Apparently it didn't bother Paul and apparently what Paul taught was that you were free to keep it or free not to keep it. He himself was not under it, but at times he kept it in order not to violate fellow believers consciences, in order to evangelize unbelievers.

As Arnold Fruchtenbaum says, "The believer in the Messiah is free from the Law of Moses. This means that he is free from the necessity of keeping any commandment of that system. But on the other hand, he is also free to keep parts of the Law of Moses if he so desires.

The biblical basis for this freedom to keep the Law can be seen in the actions of Paul, the greatest exponent of freedom from the Law. His vow in Acts 18:18 is based on Numbers 6:2, 5, 9 and 18. His desire to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost I Acts 20:16 is based on Deuteronomy 16:16. The strongest passage is Acts 21:17-26, where we see Paul, the apostle of freedom from the Law, himself keeping the Law.

The believer is free from the Law of Moses, but he is also free to keep parts of it. Thus, if a Jewish believer feels the need to refrain from eating pork, he is free to do so. The same is true for all the other commandments." However, "if you look at the details of how you would keep them, you would not be able to do so. For instance," with respect to the Feasts, "all of them required blood sacrifices, three could only be observed in Jerusalem, etc. What the rabbis have done is simply revamp the system to make it feasible to keep in a different way, but as far as the biblical way to keep it, no one can do that today. When Messiah died, the Law came to an end, and it is no longer obligatory for even Jewish believers and never was for Gentile believers anyway." With all of that said "there are two dangers that must be avoided by the Messianic believer who volunteers to keep the commandments of the Law of Moses" as best he can. "One danger is the idea that by doing so he is contributing to his own justification and sanctification. This is false and should be avoided. The second danger is in one's expecting others to keep the same commandments which he had decided to keep. This is equally wrong and borders on legalism. The one who exercises his freedom to keep the Law must recognize and respect another's freedom not to keep it."ⁱⁱ

The only thing I would add is that while Paul may have wanted to keep parts of the Law of Moses simply for culture reasons, I think his greater reason was as he expressed in 1 Cor 9:22, that he might save some. There is no reason for these ancillary issues to get in the way of the gospel.

Paul said I do all things for the sake of the gospel? Do you? Do you set aside your freedoms for the sake of the gospel? For the sake of your brothers conscience? Are you here to exercise your own freedoms? Or to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ? Who are you here for? Yourself? Or God?

ⁱ It was considered an act of piety to pay the expenses for the poor.

ⁱⁱ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, MBS 006 The Law of Moses and the Law of Messiah.

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