

CAN ONE PERSON MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

A Passion That Stays Balanced

1 Corinthians 9:16–24



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Passion. Just reading that word can spark a fire within us, but the idea isn't easy to define. According to the dictionary, *passion* has four synonyms: “fervor, ardor, enthusiasm, zeal”; and it has as one of its meanings “intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction.”¹

Jesus certainly comes to mind when one thinks of passion, but so does another person in the New Testament: the apostle Paul. He was a man with intense, driving convictions. His enemies would curse him, beat him, and stone him nearly to death, and he'd keep on preaching the gospel. He refused to run scared, to take it easy, or to play it safe. As long as there was breath in his lungs, the name of Christ would be on his lips, and the passion of God would throb in his heart.

Four particular periods in Paul's life, like four photos in an album, reveal the fire in this man's passionate spirit.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Four Brief Glimpses of Paul

Here is a brief “album” of the apostle Paul's life, as he began as Saul of Tarsus and became the great Apostle of Grace.

Photo 1 (Acts 26:11): *while he was lost, he passionately pressed on in his mission*

- Unfortunately, persecuting Christians
- Single-minded, outrageously zealous, savagely determined

Photo 2 (Acts 9:4–5, 17–20): *as he was converted, he passionately submitted to Christ*

- Instantaneous willingness to hear/change when he encountered Jesus
- Courageous vulnerability when he “went public” with his faith to the disbelief of his peers



Quotable

We need to learn to get along with those of differing philosophies—without compromising the Word of God.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Photo 3: *once he was saved, he passionately pursued his calling*

- Set records in evangelization
- Set an unmatched pace for doctrinal understanding and communication
 - Forged new covenant theology/grace/gospel
 - Wrote more of the New Testament than any other writer
 - Independently established the church in its foundational moorings

Photo 4: *when he was facing death, he passionately finished the journey*

- Admonished his friend to keep preaching the Word
- Requested various books and especially the parchments to keep sharp
- Testified that he'd "fought the fight/finished/kept the faith"

2. Three Balanced Guidelines for Ministry (1 Corinthians 9:4–14)

As God's spokesman, Paul had access to a storehouse of privileges. He had the right to enjoy daily provisions from those to whom he ministered (1 Corinthians 9:4). He had the right to have a wife and family (9:5). He had the right to refrain from working in jobs other than his ministry (9:6). He had the right to receive a salary (9:9–11). Yet Paul refused to help himself to that bounty, so that he would "cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ" (9:12).

Today, with the public's opinion of ministers at a discouraging low, we especially need to follow Paul's example for a balanced ministry. In 1 Corinthians 9:18–23, three guidelines emerge:

- **Having freedom without abusing one's rights** (9:18–19)
Paul did whatever was necessary to communicate the gospel. Yet he never lost his spiritual equilibrium. In one hand, he cradled his freedom under God's grace; in the other, he held the restraints of love.
- **Being flexible without compromising one's morals** (9:22)
Flexibility does not suggest hypocrisy or becoming soft or indiscreet. Rather, it has to do with being adaptable and getting along well with those whose philosophy of life and manner of living differs with the morality and ethics of Christianity.



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- **Standing firm without becoming aloof/unaccountable** (1 Corinthians 9:23)
As flexible as Paul was, there was one thing about which he would never bend—the gospel. Upon that ground he stood firm. Yet he didn't put himself above his message. He wasn't merely a dispenser of the truth; he was a partaker of it too. The gospel was his soul and substance—the hub around which all the spokes of his life turned.



LET'S LIVE IT

Two Basic Principles to Remember

Those who are passionate about going to all ends to reach the lost must stay flexible.

Are you flexible? Are you able to set aside your differences with people in the world? Are you making an effort to stay in touch with those outside the family of God?

Those who are passionate about doing this by all means must stay available.

Are you available? Is Christ the center of your life—the one in charge of your career, your home, and your relationships? Are you prepared to give your all to save some?

How do you balance your freedom in Christ with your love for the lost and hurting?

ENDNOTE

1. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2007), see "passion."



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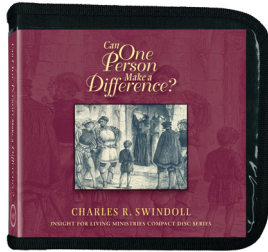
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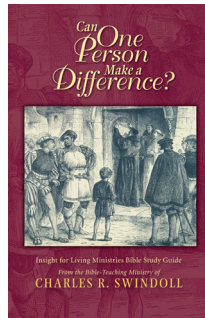


Tools for Digging Deeper



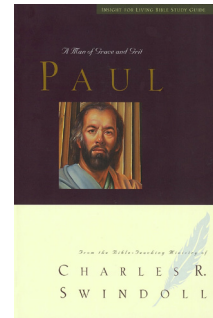
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