

'However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.' Acts 20.24.

One of the most frequent things you hear these days is, 'It's my life. I'll do what I like with it'. What can you say to *that*? It's not just stroppy teenagers' bluster. It's also the clinching argument of someone as he walks out of his marriage. It's the whole basis of the human rights racket which talks endlessly of rights, and rarely of responsibilities. As I've said before, it is the product of the 18thC Enlightenment with its 'sovereignty of the individual'. Today's form is better known as consumerism where 'the consumer is king', and the most holy word is 'choice'. It is basically selfishness, where life is all me, me, me, and my needs. 'It's my life; I'll do what I want', makes sense in the light of that, doesn't it?

But let's go now to *another* way of looking at things, the Bible, for the Bible as God's Word shews us how to see things, not from the position of me, me, me, but *God*. Turn now to p1148, 1 Cor 6.18-19 ... 'You are not your own'. Wow! That's a bit different from 'It's my life; I'll do what I want', isn't it? And actually, 'You are not your own' is nearer reality than the delusion 'It's my life; I'll do what I want'. 'You are not your own'. Alex and Amy, you are no longer your own, are you, now that Abigail has come into your lives? Your life has changed for ever. There's no more care-free holidays for you any more! And yet it amazes me that parents still think they can have it all. You are not your own. There are far too many married men who still think they can live the bachelor life. Well, no they can't. You are not your own any more. We are all

connected to someone. Our actions affect others. Teenagers in a strop don't realise how they hurt their parents, sometimes parents don't want to face up to how their own silly actions hurt their children. 'It's my life? I'll do what I want?' It's a delusion, and a delusion which is hurting others. The Bible's 'You are not your own' is nearer the mark. We're all connected and have responsibilities. There is such a thing as community, something bigger than each of us. The Bible puts its beautifully: 'we are bound up in the bundle of life'.

Abigail has just been received into God's worldwide family, the Church, by Baptism. She now *belongs* to something bigger than herself, just as she belongs to her family. So how can we even *think* that we live only for ourselves, and that it's my life, and I'll do what I want? We're all connected.

It's a strange irony that as today we talk endlessly about 'community', so we are joining fewer and fewer organisations. There's no shortage of children wanting to join Brownies and Cubs. The problem is getting adults to volunteer to lead them.

In St Paul's farewell speech to the Elders of Ephesus he said, 'I consider my life nothing to me'. Why did he say this? Paul had once been a very selfish man, who thought he was in charge, running his own life. All that changed when one day on the road to Damascus he met the risen Lord Jesus whom for years he had written off as a fake. From now on, Paul said to God: 'I'm yours now. Use my life for what you want.' V24: 'I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.' Paul was no longer living for self, but for Christ.

Selfish people are rarely happy, and have few friends. You know yourselves how good you feel when you do something for someone else. When I used to give blood, I would feel noble for days afterwards! 'You are *not* your own'.

We did not give ourselves life. *God* gave us life. Abigail is God's gift to you. She is on loan to you. Cherish her. But you do not *own* her. We do not own our own bodies. *God* gave us them; our bodies are a temple. That's why we are not entitled to abort babies, and practise euthanasia. We are not refuse to be dumped when life becomes inconvenient. When life is cheap, and my needs are all that count, we end up with Primary school boys torturing other boys almost to death, beaten almost to death and forced to perform sex acts on each other. Such behaviour doesn't come from nowhere. We belong to each other, and we belong to God who made us in his divine image. We are most emphatically *not* our own.

Paul makes no claim on his own life. Far from saying, 'It's my life, I'll do what I want with it' he says: 'I consider my life nothing to me'. It was given to him by God. He was reclaimed on that Damascus Road by Christ who came looking for him. Paul put his whole life at Christ's disposal. It always impresses me to go through the list of the clergy. Let's be honest. Some of them are duds. I'm 54 next time, and I'm just not qualified to do a proper job now, but *some* of the clergy used to be doctors, dentists, judges, people who could easily have made a mint, if they'd stuck at it. It was a sacrifice for them to be ordained. Gen Sir Richard Dannatt who has just retired as head of the Army, very nearly resigned

seven years ago to be ordained. These are surrendered lives. I read of Muslims in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan who convert to Christ. Their lives are at risk, because leaving Islam is punishable by death. Michael Nazir-ali, himself of Pakistani Muslim stock, has just resigned as Bishop of Rochester to work for Muslims abroad who convert. If all religions are the same, and Jesus is just an optional add-on, why do these people bother to risk death and being shunned by their Muslim families to follow Christ?

What sacrificial, surrendered lives they live! How different from our society's selfish, consumerist attitude which is taking us nowhere! 'It's my life; I'll do what I want', is a terrible ideology and it's destroying people and our society. This is what has made ours a 'broken society.'

So, *is it my life to do with as I please? Or is it God's life? Is your life God's precious gift to you, to use in his service, and in the service of others?* The answer to that crucial question is what marks the Christian out from the world. After his conversion St Paul essentially said, 'Forget what *I* want to do with my life. What does *God* want to do with me now?' Selfishness doesn't work, because it isn't true. The Bible's 'You are not your own' is nearer reality. To put your life at *God's* disposal, (so different from the world's 'It's my life; I'll do what I want'), is to know his hand upon you. It is to know that we belong - to each other, and to Christ who died for us. To give up our claim on ourselves and to say to God, 'Here's my life; use me' is to know that your life has significance and a purpose. We all need that.