

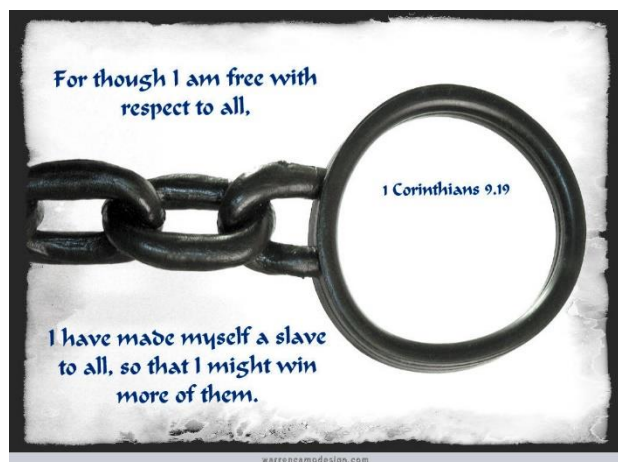
Becoming all Things to Win Some

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567

Freedom is a privilege that comes with great responsibility. In Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible (Colossians 1:16). Humanity was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) with an amazing gift called free will. While God has given us the right to do anything we want, including disobeying Him, He expects us to be like Jesus and do His will. Since it is God's will that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9), we are called to preach the Gospel message to everyone we meet. By the power of His matchless grace, God has produced in our hearts a burning passion for the salvation of others.¹ To reach them will not be an easy task! The diverse cultural backgrounds of our North American culture often mean that using a "canned" approach to spread the Gospel message is going to produce little or no fruit. To reach our postmodern culture we need to be like Paul and give up our freedom to live safely inside of our own culture and become all things to all people so that we might win some to Christ.

SURRENDERING FREEDOM TO BECOME A SLAVE



To be effective in evangelism for Paul meant that the salvation of others was more important than claiming, possessing and preserving his own rights.² In the ancient Greek and Roman world of Paul's time the principle distinction made by law persons was that all human beings were either free or slaves.³ Being born a Roman citizen,⁴ Paul was not "owned" by anyone. Paul was so interested in putting away anything that might hinder the Gospel of Christ (1 Corinthians

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "[By All Means Save Some,](#)" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 243.

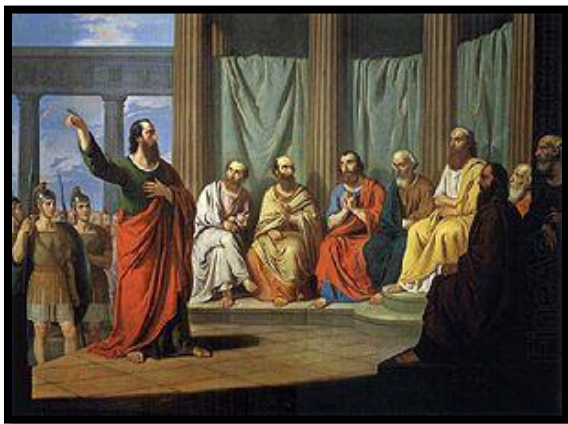
² Marion L. Soards, [1 Corinthians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 192–193.

³ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, [The First Letter to the Corinthians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 421.

⁴ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2260.

9:12), that he also chose to not take a wife or any payment for his ministry endeavors. After all, in Paul's time the more you paid a speaker the more one could boast ownership over that person.⁵ Even though Paul went through great efforts to maintain his freedom from others owning him, he chose to become a slave to all cultures everywhere. For a person to become a slave in Paul's day meant giving up one's identity, a social death, in which the person becomes a surrogate body for the slaveholder.⁶ For Paul this denying of self was necessary to emulate the pattern of Christ who emptied Himself (Philippians 2:7) and became a slave to all!⁷ Paul denied self by adapting his personal behavior and methods of preaching⁸ to three particular groups of people: the Jews under the law, those not having the law and the weak.

Jews Under the Law



²⁰ 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.

Since a slave was expected to adjust to the cultural family they served,⁹ when in the presence of the Jews Paul chose to take on their law observing patterns.¹⁰ Even though Paul was called as an apostle primarily to the Gentile people (Galatians 2:8), he made it his custom to speak at the synagogue of each town that he entered (Acts 17:2).¹¹ To keep from hindering the

⁵ D. A. Carson, [“Why Become All Things to All People?”](#) in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), 1 Co 9:19–23.

⁶ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, [The First Letter to the Corinthians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 421.

⁷ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, [The First Letter to the Corinthians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 422.

⁸ Marion L. Soards, [1 Corinthians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 193.

⁹ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, [The First Letter to the Corinthians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 424.

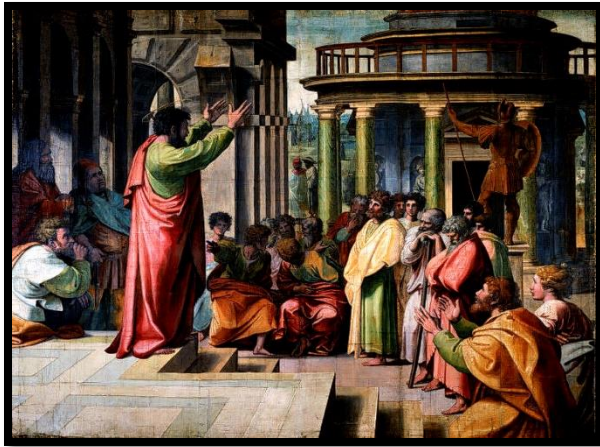
¹⁰ Marion L. Soards, [1 Corinthians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 193.

¹¹ David K. Lowery, [“1 Corinthians,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 524.

Jewish people from embracing the Gospel message, Paul chose to follow all 613 commandments of the Torah while in their presence.¹² While following these commands was not strenuous for he who once considered himself faultless in regards to legalistic righteousness (Philippians 3:6), Paul tells the church of Corinth that as a new man (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20) he no longer related to God by following the law of Moses but instead through grace and faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ.¹³ Though he was free from legalism (Galatians 2:4-5), Paul subjected himself to the scruples of the Jews when in their presence so that he might win some of them to Christ (Romans 1:16)!¹⁴

Those not Having the Law

21 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.



Paul also accommodated himself to the Gentiles so that he might in turn win some of the to Christ. While many Jewish Rabbis such as Hillel made the law no more a burden than necessary to the Gentiles to win people for Judaism, Paul went further and did not try to bring the them under the Jewish law at all!¹⁵ When he was in their presence Paul did not observe the ceremonial laws of the Jews but instead was known to sit, eat and follow their traditions. Since “not having the law” in the LXX usually meant “evil” or “wicked” Paul

had to be careful to not give the Corinthians the impression that he was “lawless” which would imply that he practiced idolatry, sexual immorality and greed when evangelizing.¹⁶ To keep

¹² Alan F. Johnson, [1 Corinthians](#), vol. 7, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 147.

¹³ C. K. Barrett, [The First Epistle to the Corinthians](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1968), 212.

¹⁴ David K. Lowery, [“1 Corinthians.”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 524.

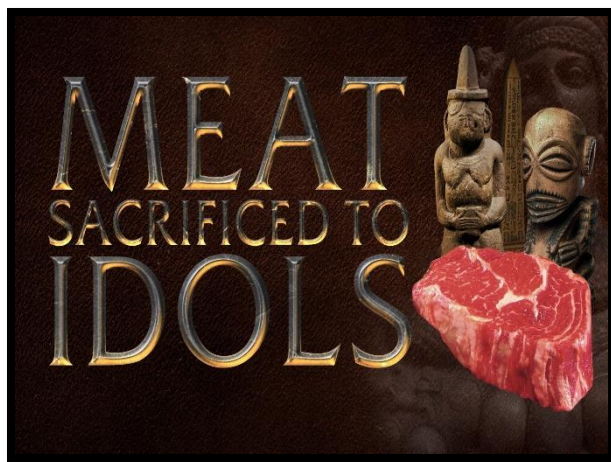
¹⁵ Leon Morris, [1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 136–137.

¹⁶ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, [The First Letter to the Corinthians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 428.

from being called an advocate of libertinism (1 Corinthians 6:12-20),¹⁷ Paul says that while he is no longer under the authority of the law he still governs his evangelism efforts in accordance with the law of Christ!¹⁸ While becoming all things to the Gentiles often meant participating in their festivals to create rapport with them, Paul refused to mimic any of their sins.¹⁹

Those who are Weak

22a 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.



The final example that Paul gave was of himself accommodating a group of people to win them to Christ were the weak. While Paul's reference to the weak could have related to Jews and Gentiles that were in a state of unbelief,²⁰ weakness as a motif in his letter often referred to those who were weak in conscience, therefore most of the Corinthian congregation (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).²¹ Unlike the Jews and Gentiles of the first two groups, the weak were Christians whom Paul was trying to keep them from slipping.²² For example, let's look at Paul's approach to the weak in chapter eight of this letter. How were the strong to react to weak

Christians who believed eating meat offered to idols meant committing idolatry? His answer was to forebear with their foolishness for a while and when they were ready with gentleness,

¹⁷ David K. Lowery, "[1 Corinthians](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 524.

¹⁸ Alan F. Johnson, [1 Corinthians](#), vol. 7, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 147.

¹⁹ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2260.

²⁰ David K. Lowery, "[1 Corinthians](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 524.

²¹ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, [The First Letter to the Corinthians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 429.

²² Leon Morris, [1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 137.

humility and respect help enrich their theology so that they become more mature in the faith.²³ When Paul was near the weak of conscience he did nothing to cause them harm even though he knew full well that their self-imposed restrictions could not be validated with Scripture.

Preaching for the Sake of the Gospel Message

22^b I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

The reason that Paul chose to become all things to the Jews, Gentiles and those who are weak was to spread the Gospel message. While Paul's overall motivation was to run the race to



win the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24), “share in the blessings” was a reference to his desire to be a participant or partner²⁴ in preaching of the Gospel.²⁵ While preaching was entrusted to Paul (1 Corinthians 9:17, 4:1; Galatians 2:7), it was not put under his control.²⁶ While some would plant seed and others water them, as a co-worker in God's kingdom Paul knew that it was God alone who makes the plant grow (1 Corinthians 3:5-9). While beautiful are the feet that preach the Good News (Romans 10:15), the wind of the Spirit moves

in mysterious (John 3:8). Paul's heart breathed after the salvation of others and as such he was willing to give up his rights and freedom to become a slave of all so that he see some come to know Christ.²⁷

²³ D. A. Carson, [“Why Become All Things to All People?”](#), in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), 1 Co 9:19–23.

²⁴ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, [The First Letter to the Corinthians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 432.

²⁵ Collins, 356. See the helpful discussion in Robert L. Plummer, “Imitation of Paul and the Church's Missionary Role in 1 Corinthians,” *JETS* 44 (2001), 226–30.

²⁶ C. K. Barrett, [The First Epistle to the Corinthians](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1968), 216.

²⁷ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2260.

PREACHING TO THE LOST OF TODAY'S SOCIETY

The postmodern culture in which we live consists of groups of people with varied ethnic, political, socio-economic and religious backgrounds. Due to immigration of people to North America from all over the world, one can expect to meet people within one's own country of whom have varied cultural nuances. For example, laughing while showing your teeth or tipping



a person from Japan can be viewed as rude or insulting. Being a few minutes late to meet someone from Germany is unacceptable because it sends them the message that your time is more valuable than theirs. Having your hands in your pockets when meeting someone from Turkey or South Korea is considered a sign of arrogance. Immediately opening a present from a person from India or China is often construed as an act of greed. Asking for salt or pepper at a meal might offend someone from France, Italy, Spain or Japan because it

sends the message that the food is terrible. Polishing off one's meal when visiting someone from China, Philippines, Thailand or Russia sends the message that the portion of food given was inadequate and one is still hungry. Blowing your nose while in the presence of someone from China, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia or Turkey would not only be considered rude but also repulsive.²⁸

To reach our postmodern, multiethnic communities the church needs to become all things to all people so that we might win some to Christ. This means change! No longer can the church remain within the confines of its own building and expect their multiethnic community to



storm its doors! To reach the lost souls we need to first understand and then emulate their cultures while spreading the Good News. This of course does not mean sharing in their sin or changing the message that God has entrusted to us but merely changing the methods of sharing the Gospel to not only show respect for but also to speak in their "cultural language.". The church needs to change from within as well. If we truly want to make our "family" hospitable to the diverse populations that we are trying to reach then

our preaching, special events and preference of music styles, for example need to reflect

²⁸ Taken from the following website: <http://mentalfloss.com/article/67529/24-american-behaviors-considered-rude-other-countries>

diversity of these various cultures. While this change might be uncomfortable to some, those in which “self” truly has died so that Christ might live within their hearts will not mind becoming “slaves” to others to reach them!

To be like Paul and truly become all things to all people to win some to Christ will not happen without passion. Until God changes our cold hearts into fiery furnaces of burning passion²⁹ for the lost souls of this world we will forever be looking upon the prodigal sons and daughters of this world with an attitude of indifference.



“Good will conquer evil, not by the assistance of governments and the arms of potentates, not by the prestige of bishops and popes, and all their pompous array, but by hearts that burn, and souls that glow, and eyes that weep, and knees that bend in wrestling prayer. These are the artillery of God, by using such weapons as these he not only foils his foes, but triumphs over them in it, confounding the mighty by the weak, the wise by the simple, and the things which are by the things which are not.”³⁰

As soon as God first opened your eyes so that you might see, ears so that you might hear and heart so that you might understand the Gospel message, did you not feel overwhelming joy and an intense passion to share God with others? Or like the church of Laodicea has your heart become spiritually naked, poor and miserable because you refuse to let “self” interest die? Until the passion burns within your heart to no longer allow the hungry, weary, lost souls of this world faint in our presence, the only ones we can ever expect to meet are those who are clones of our very self.

²⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, [“By All Means Save Some,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 243.

³⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, [“By All Means Save Some,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 244.