

Sunday, March 12, 2017—I Corinthians 9:19-23: All Things to All Men

### Introduction

- Last Sunday we continued our study of I Corinthians 9 by reviewing some Pauline Principles Regarding Reward. Specifically, we talked about Principle 8— positive reward is given for work willingly performed; not for things that we are obligated to do (I Cor. 9:16-18).
- This morning we want to move on through the passage by looking at verses 19 through 23.

### I Corinthians 9:19

- **For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.**
- *For though I be free from all men*—this is a present tense statement. Paul did not answer to any man. He answered directly to the Lord Jesus Christ. No man could put Paul under compulsion to function or act in a particular manner.
- *Yet*—even though he was “free from of all men” Paul chose to make himself a servant unto all. This statement is consistent with other statements Paul makes in this chapter.
  - I Corinthians 9:12, 15, 18—Paul was the one making this decision.
- Paul chose to serve those he ministered to rather than demanding to be served.
- *That*—tells you purpose and the intent of why Paul made this choice. This statement is in the active voice which indicates that Paul is making this decision for himself. It is also in the subjunctive mood which means that even though Paul is making these decisions with the goal of “gaining the more” it doesn’t mean that he defiantly will. Thus, the phrase “might gain the more” in English.
- Paul sought to discharge the dispensation of the gospel that had been committed to his trust in a manner that would maximize the number of people who would get saved. He sought to gain the more.

### I Corinthians 9:20-22

- These three verses serve as an elaboration on Paul’s statement in verse 19. There are essentially four types of people that Paul identifies in these verses: Jews, those who are under the law, those who are without law, and the weak.
- *Jews*—these were those who were of the stock of Israel. They like Paul, were ethnic Jews in the sense that they were the physical seed of Abraham.

- *Under the Law*—in addition to the ethnic Jews from the previous category, those “under the law” would have also included Gentiles who were either under Israel’s the law in the sense that they were proselytes or where aware of it and feared the God of Israel.
  - Acts 13:16, 42—Paul is speaking to both Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia.
  - Acts 17:1-3—when Paul preached to the Jews, we find instance after instance in the book of Acts where he turned them back to the Old Testament, to their Jewish scriptures and based everything upon the Jews’ hope of the Messiah, showing how all had been fulfilled in Christ.
  
- *Without Law*—as we saw last time, from the earliest days of his conversion Paul knew he was sent to the Gentiles, many of whom were completely ignorant of Israel’s Law.
  - Acts 14:11-18
  - Acts 17:22-34—when speaking to Gentiles, men who did not know the law of Moses, Paul put himself on the level with those to whom he spoke. He spoke of God, the Creator of all things, who gives us “rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). The God who did all this cannot be an image, an idol made with man’s hands, He created the heavens and the earth. Paul undertakes to show how God sent his Son to save men who have sinned against him. In short, states the gospel in such a way that the Gentiles will understand it.
  
- *The Weak*—opinions abound regarding who the weak are in verse 22.
  - Could this be a reference to the physically weak that Paul healed during the Acts period?
  - H.A. Ironside said, “He (Paul) did not try to astonish people with his eloquence, he gave them the Word to convict and help and bless and cheer and make things plain the he might gain the weak.”
    - I Corinthians 2:1-2—this could certainly fit with other things Paul says in I Corinthians.
  - C.R. Stam stated the following regarding the matter, “he (Paul) simply teaches us here not to flex our muscles among the weak, but to deal with them gently.
  - Harry Bultema—thinks that Paul is referring to the weak in chapter 8 who eat as though an idol were something in the world.

- The essential point of this discussion is found in verse 22. Paul adopted a strategy of flexible response that could be utilized effectively regardless of who he was dealing with. The bottom line was that people were getting saved. Regarding the end of verse 22, Harry Bultema stated the following in his *Brief Notes on I and II Corinthians*:
  - “And he (Paul) had no rigid method in dealing with souls as we often have, but he used all means and methods. To get some souls, the by all means is the only means. It should make us careful not to criticize if a brother by some unique or bizarre method gets more souls than we by quieter methods. Any method to win precious souls, if it does not positively run counter to Scripture, is part of the all means.” (77)

### **I Corinthians 9:23**

- **And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.**
- Why did Paul adopt this strategy and mode of operation in terms of how he conducted his ministry? He did it for the sake of the gospel. Paul was concerned that the gospel would have maximum impact. Paul’s number one priority was that the gospel might go forth and souls be saved.
- In the context, verse 23 would include not only his becoming “all things to all men” in verses 19-22 but also his decision to make the gospel of Christ without charge, that he abuse not his power in the gospel (I Cor. 9:18)
  - I Corinthians 9:12, 15
- Paul’s desire was that he might partake in the gospel with as many souls as possible. The idea at the end of verse 23 is that Paul wanted to be a joint-partaker with the Corinthians in the benefits of the gospel.
- This dispensation of the gospel committed to Paul that he faithfully discharged possessed the following benefits:
  - Romans 1:16—it was the power of God unto salvation.
  - Romans 16:25—it possessed the ability to help stablish the saints.