

Sunday, March 19, 2017—I Corinthians 9:21—Understanding The Parenthesis

### Introduction

- Last Sunday we continued our study of I Corinthians 9 by looking at verses 19-23. In doing so, we observed Paul’s “gain the more” or “all things to all men” strategy.
- Verse 19—this was a decision that Paul made for himself.
- Verses 20-22—identify four types of people that Paul sought to minister to: 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 were aware of it and feared the God of Israel.
  - *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.
  - *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.
    - Regarding “the weak,” one of our visitors last week asked if Paul’s reference to “the weak” could include all four these categories of “weak.”

- If you recall from last week, we skipped over the parenthesis in verse 21. That is where we need to begin this morning.

### **I Corinthians 9:21 (The Parenthesis)**

- Remember from last week that verses 20 through 22 elaborate on Paul's statement at the end of verse 19 about making himself a servant unto all that he might gain the more.
- In explaining that strategy Paul identifies the four groups of people that we just reviewed in the introduction. In verse 21 Paul states that he made himself "as without law" when dealing with those who are without law i.e., Gentiles who were completely ignorant of Israel's law.
- Then in the middle of verse 21 Paul stated the following in the parenthesis "being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ." The question at hand is what did Paul mean when he penned these words?
- This phrase has puzzled and troubled many believers.
- Some have understood Paul's statement in a way that makes Paul inconsistent in his testimony. They have reasoned that Paul had two ministries, one to Israel and another to the Gentiles. According to this thinking, when Paul was among Jews he subjected himself to the Mosaic Law whereas when He was among Gentiles he enjoyed freedom from the Law.
- Acts 18:4-7—if this exposition were true it would have Paul conducting himself in a very underhanded and deceitful manner. In verse 4, while in the synagogue at Corinth Paul, would have been subjecting himself to the Law of Moses only to enter into the house of Justus; which shared a wall with the synagogue, where he would not have kept the Law.
- Galatians 2:4-5—Paul did not even give place to those who sought to constrain Titus to be circumcised for even one hour.
- Galatians 2:6—the Jewish leadership of the Little Flock in Jerusalem added nothing to Paul's understanding.
- Galatians 2:7—"but contrariwise" means that Paul added something to their understanding that they didn't already know.
- Galatians 2:9—Peter, James, and John agreed to limit their ministry to the Little Flock (the circumcision) while Paul would go to the heathen (Jews not part of the Little Flock and Gentiles). A descriptor that now included Israel along with the Gentiles.
- Galatians 2:12-14—Paul withstood Peter to the face for his confusing conduct.

- I Corinthians 9:21—Paul could not have withstood Peter to the face while he himself was conducting his ministry in essentially the same way the Peter had been behaving. Therefore, we do not accept the understanding of what Paul meant in the parenthetical portion of verse 21 to mean he had two separate ministers.
- Galatians 3:1-5
- Galatians 5:1-6
- I Corinthians 9:20-21—if Paul himself were under the law, as some Christians think a believer is, he would not say, “I became as under the law.” So then where was Paul? He was not under the law nor was he without law. He was not subject to some legal ritual nor was he lawless. Where did Paul stand? He stood exactly where the parenthesis says he stood:
  - “being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,”
- Essentially Paul states, “I am not under the law of Moses, neither am I lawless, but I am under law to God being legitimately subject to Christ.” Therefore, believers are neither under the law nor are we without law, but legitimately subject to Christ.
- Where do we find the instructions of Christ to the church the body of Christ during the dispensation of grace in the epistles of the Apostle Paul.
  - I Corinthians 11:1—we follow Christ today by following the writings of the Apostle Paul.
  - Galatians 1:11-12—Paul received his revelation directly from the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - Acts 26:16
    - II Corinthians 12:7
  - I Timothy 6:1-5—Paul’s epistle contain the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- I Timothy 1:3-9—those who are desiring the teach the law for the cultivating of Christian life and Godliness don’t know what they are doing. The law brings death and condemnation not life.
  - Galatians 4:21—Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?
  - II Corinthians 3:17—But if the ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away:

- Titus 2:11-12—it is the grace of God that teaches us how to live Godly in this present world not the law.
- I Corinthians 9:21—Paul is not under the law but neither is he lawless in the sense of being reckless. Rather is subject to the words of Christ committed to his trust.

### **Final Thoughts**

- Last week as we considered Paul’s flexible response strategy in verses 20 through 22 we read Paul’s message in Athens from Mars Hill as an example of how he approached those who are without law.
- Acts 17:31-34—I was reminded last week following the message that the response was not outstanding.
- On Sunday, October 4, 2015 while preaching on I Corinthians 2:1-5 I stated the following in my comments on verse 2 regarding Paul’s approach in Corinth in Acts 18 versus his approach in Athens in Acts 17.
  - In terms of his preaching in Corinth, Paul stuck with the basics, i.e., the preaching of “Christ crucified” (I Cor. 1:23).
  - Note the past tense in English on the expression, “for I determined.” In other words, Paul made this determination before he entered in among them. In Greek, the verb translated “determined” is in the Aorist Tense and the Indicative Mood which indicates an action that happened at a specific point of time in the past.
  - Paul knew more than the simple message of Christ crucified when he arrived at Corinth he just determined not to go beyond it in terms of his preaching to the Corinthians.
  - I Corinthians 1:30—Paul wanted to make sure that the Corinthians were grounded in the basics and were properly glorying in Christ before moving on to more advanced truths.
  - One has to wonder if Paul made this determination because of the unique set of cultural circumstances surrounding the city of Corinth. Paul seems to have known that if he had given the Corinthians too much to fast they would not have been able to handle it.
  - It is worth considering that Paul’s course of conduct in Corinth was influenced by his experience in Athens, the last city he was in prior to his arrival in Corinth. While in Athens Paul waxed more philosophical, according to Acts 17.
    - Acts 17:16-33
  - Acts 17:34—while some believed there is no record in the Acts chronology of a local church being established in Athens.

- This is yet another example of Paul's flexible response strategy and ability to adjust his approach with goal and aim of by all means saving some.