**“All Things To All People”**

*Being the Church –* 1st Corinthians 9

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As we study “Being the Church” we are asking God to show us how to be the church that honors and pleases Him and operates according to His Word. We are studying 1st Corinthians to help us do that. Paul wrote the letter while he was in Ephesus to “the Church” he planted in Corinth,

**Chapter 7 -** Regarding Marriage and Relationships*. Seek God first, before seeking another person to meet your needs.*

**1st Cor 7:35*“****I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”*

Our “undivided devotion to the Lord” is the most important thing in our life. Even beyond our devotion to our spouse and family. Paul is saying that anything in your life that interferes with our *undivided devotion to the Lord* should, if possible be avoided. Seeking a wife/husband is a wonderful, honorable thing, unless it interferes with your undivided devotion to the Lord.

**Chapter 8 - Regarding Meat Sacrificed to idols.**

**1 Cor 8:9“**Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.”

What we eat or drink, or *don’t* eat or drink is not necessarily of much concern (unless we eat and drink in excess and become a drunkard or a glutton). What *is* of great concern however, is how it effects our brothers and sisters. The meat sacrificed to idols in Corinth, may have showed up on the market as prime cut steaks, and were fine for them to eat since Paul said clearly that “*An idol is nothing at all in the world”,* meaning that they are nothing to fear or even take seriously. But if our brother or sister is greatly disturbed by you eating that particular meat, then it should be avoided for their sake.

He says in verse 13, **13 “**Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.”

The message is that we are not just living for, and about ourselves. We are part of the Lord’s body. Everything we do and say matters to the other members of the body.

### In Chapter 9 Paul continues on this theme. He explains that we have the right to do many things, but a life surrendered to the Lord and His purposes is not characterized by *claiming* those rights, it is more about *surrendering* those rights for the sake of others, and the gospel.

**Text:**

**1st Corinthians 9:1-6 “**Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? **2**Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

**3**This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. **4**Don’t we have the right to food and drink? **5**Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas? **6**Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living?

He is pointing out that Peter and James both had wives and are supported by the church. He and Barnabas, however, appear to *not* have wives and work secular jobs to support themselves. *(It’s interesting to note that Barnabas is identified as “an Apostle” here, as well as in other places in the Bible. We sometimes forget that he was the one who brought Paul into the church, vouching for him when the others still feared him.)*

**1st Corinthians 9:7-23“**Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? **8**Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn’t the Law say the same thing? **9**For it is written in the Law of Moses: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it about oxen that God is concerned? **10**Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. **11**If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? **12**If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more?

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

**13**Don’t you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? **14**In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

**15**But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. **16**For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! **17**If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. **18**What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.

He is pointing here out that he is *not* a hired hand or employed by anyone to do this work, therefore he is not beholden to anyone but the Lord.

**19**Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. **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. **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. **22**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. **23**I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

He is explaining that those who work to build and grow the church deserve to be paid by the church. He explains here however, that he is voluntarily giving up that right, offering himself free of charge so that nothing would hinder the gospel from being preached in freedom and he would not be bound to anyone’s particular agenda or under anyone’s direction other than the Lord’s. He made himself a slave, *someone who works for no pay*, so that he could win as many as possible (v.19).

He did this by connecting to Aquila and Priscilla and working for them when he first got to Corinth. They were a married couple with a tent-making business who were Jewish believers from Rome. They got kicked out of Rome and moved to Corinth when Claudius expelled all the Jews from Rome around 49AD.

His goal was to do everything and anything he could do for the sake of the gospel.

He said *“I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.* (v. 22)

* To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews.
* To those under the law I became like one under the law.
* To those not having the law I became like one not having the law, so as to win those not having the law.
* To the weak I became weak, to win the weak

Paul was able to “become all things to all people” by entering into the communities and into relationships with the people he was trying to reach.

This is how he conducted himself, not only on this missionary journey, but through his entire life. It is fascinating how he was able to use this method to create opportunities to *preach the gospel* in every situation he faced. He identified himself as “a Jew”, to the Jews, “a Roman” when speaking to Romans, as “a Pharisee” when speaking to Pharisees, as somewhat of “a Philosopher” when speaking to Philosophers, etc.

* As “a Jew” when among the Jews;
  + **Acts 22:3**“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors.”
* As “a Roman Citizen” when among Roman Centurions;
  + **Acts 22:27“**The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes, I am,” he answered.
* As “a Pharisee”, while standing trial before the Sanhedrin;
  + **Acts 23:6** “Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, *I am a Pharisee*, descended from Pharisees.
* As “a Philosopher” among the Philosophers in Athens;

**Acts 17: 21,22,24,28“**(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and *listening to the latest ideas.)***22**Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.>>>

**24**“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.>>>

***28****‘For in him we live and move and have our being,”*As some of your own poets have said, *‘We are his offspring.”*

He wasn’t just preaching the gospel, He was positioning himself as a Philosopher in the Areopagus, the very epicenter of Philosophy in the ancient world.

And he brilliantly used quotes from their own poets and philosophers to do it;

* *“For in him we live and move and have our being” -* A quote from *Epimenides*, a Geek philosopher/poet who lived in the 6th or 7th century BC.
* *“We are his offspring.” - A quote* from the Greek Poet *Aratus* written 300 years prior, in a famous poem to Zeus.

Here is a perfect example of Paul using their culture and their scope of understanding, to preach the gospel. He did *not do it just to fit in*, or to *get them to like and accept him*. He did it to preach the gospel in hopes that they would repent, turn to God and do away with all their meaningless philosophy and poetry in exchange for the wisdom of God and a life in the Spirit by accepting Jesus as Messiah. That was the goal.

Paul’s initial mission when he was commissioned by the leaders of the Apostles was to go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles (*non-Jews)*. He did this throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece and all along the way to Rome.

Paul’s Commissioning:

**Gal. 2:6-10 “6**And the leaders of the church had nothing to add to what I was preaching. (By the way, their reputation as great leaders made no difference to me, for God has no favorites.) **7**Instead, they saw that God had given me the responsibility of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as he had given Peter the responsibility of preaching to the Jews. **8**For the same God who worked through Peter as the apostle to the Jews also worked through me as the apostle to the Gentiles.**9**In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers. They encouraged us to keep preaching to the Gentiles, while they continued their work with the Jews.”

Even though Paul’s mission was to the Gentiles, it did not stop him from also preaching the gospel to the Jews as well. In fact it seems that most of the time when he went into a new city, the first place he started was in the Jewish synagogue. He seemed to have *Romans 1:16* in his mind when he went forth boldly to preach the gospel.

**Romans 1:16** “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”

Throughout his journey, he seemed to *start with the Jews* first to see who among them would accept Messiah, but *along with that* also invited the Gentiles to hear the gospel and be saved.

**In Cyprus -** Acts 13:4**“**The two of them [Paul and Barnabas], sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. **5**When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the *Jewish synagogues*.”

**In Pisidian Antioch -** Acts 13:14-15 **“**From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered *the synagogue* and sat down. **15**After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them”

**In Iconium -** Acts 14:1 “At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the *Jewish synagogue****.*** There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed.”

**In Thessalonica -** Acts 17:1-2**“**When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a *Jewish synagogue*. **2**As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures”

**In Berea –** Acts 17-10 **“**As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue”

**In Ephesus -** Acts 19:8 “Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.”

***In Corinth*** at the very beginning of the Corinthian church;

**Acts 18:1-6 “**After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. **2**There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, **3**and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. **4**Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

**5**When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. **6**But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” **7**Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. **8**Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and *many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.*

**Paul gave us a wonderful example of what it means to “**become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”

He used every connection he had, every bit of influence he had, and every opportunity he could find to preach the gospel. Each one of us has connections, influence and opportunities to preach the gospel as well. Are we willing to give that over to the Lord for His purposes? Are we willing to allow our friendships and reputation to be used to bring people out of darkness and into His marvelous light? This is what it means to *“become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some*”. We have to be willing to put our fear of rejection or our feelings of inadequacy behind us and focus on the prize of seeing our friends and family come to Jesus. It’s too great a prize to miss out on.

**1st Corinthians 9:24-27“**Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. **25**Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. **26**Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. **27**No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” <>

*[ \*example: Dave playing in a hard rock band with popular local rockers. Not for the purpose of Rock & Roll, but for the purpose of sharing the gospel. ]*

**Our commission is to be His witnesses to everyone. Jesus’s last words to his disciples before he ascended were:**

**Acts 1:8**“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, & The Ends of the earth.

*Think about it this way;*

**Jerusalem** (their hometown) For us: Our local friends and family – people you know and know you.

**Judea** (the greater region they lived in) – For us: People we don’t know put probably have something in common with.

**Samaria** (outside their region) – For us: People we don’t know, and probably have very little in common with. God wants to reach them too.

**The Ends of the earth** (uttermost parts) For us: “Anybody Anywhere”

God wants to use each of us to bring people to Him. He will empower us, equip us, lead us, and guide us, all we need to do is “*be willing.”*

* **Be willing to make the Kingdom of God our priority over everything else in the world.**
* **Be willing to make the message of the gospel the most important message we speak… *and***
* **Be willing as Paul was, to; *“become all things to all people so that by all possible means we might save some, …and do all this for the sake of the gospel, that we may share in its blessings.***