

*"I Have Become All Things to All Men"*

1 Cor. 9:15-23

*Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly*

Chapter 9 is a part of the larger section that runs from chapter 8 through chapter 10. The entire passage is dealing with issues of liberty. Remember the context: Paul is speaking to them about their "rights" based on their "knowledge" of eating meat sacrificed to idols in a temple restaurant. Paul will ask them to forego that "right," even as he foregoes his own rights as an apostle; but Paul will also use the occasion to defend his apostolic position before doubting Corinthians.

In verses 1-14, Paul gives six reasons why he had the right to be supported by the churches to which he ministered. "Yet Paul had not accepted that which was his right and privilege; he had paid his own way. He did not want anyone ever to have an excuse for thinking or saying that he was in it for the money."

In our present paragraph Paul tells us what he did and why he did it.

I. Paul's apostolic restraint (vv. 12, 15-18)

Notice Paul's language in verse 12.

A. Paul's reasoning (v. 12)

1. We endure all things (v. 12b)

The word Paul uses for "endure" is a verb. The noun means "roof" or "thatch." It means "to cover with silence, to endure patiently or silently."

2. We will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ (v. 12c [purpose clause])

"The word translated 'hindrance' means literally 'a cutting into,' and was used of breaking up a road to prevent the enemy's advance. Paul had avoided doing anything which might prevent a clear road for the gospel advance."

Paul's actions remind me of Proverbs 10:12, 17:9, and 1 Peter 4:8. Paul was willing to endure silently and patiently personal wrong in order that he might minister to those who did not know Christ. The word used in 1 Corinthians 9:12 to speak of endurance is also used in 13:7 for love. Paul showed restraint in order to receive the reward.

B. Paul's reward (vv. 16-18)

1. The reward was not for the message or the ministry of the gospel (vv. 16, 17).

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Paul could do nothing less or other than preach the gospel. He was compelled to preach by the call of God on his life. Paul was obligated to do what he did. There is no reward for carrying out one's responsibility. A slave is not rewarded for obeying. This is what is expected of him.

2. The reward was for preaching without charge (v. 18).

Paul's reward was in voluntarily giving up his rights in order to minister to the unsaved without charge to them.

II. Paul's apostolic freedom (vv. 19-23)

Verses 19-23 provide an interesting perspective as to how Paul viewed the ministry of preaching the gospel and of reaching people. Paul knew that he was "free from all" (v.19), but he gave up the right of freedom and made himself a servant of all.

A. Paul's sacrificial attitude (v. 19)

Paul speaks of being free from all men (v. 19). Paul has used the word "free" several times in 1 Corinthians (7:21, 22, 39, 9:1, 19, 12:13). He sets the statement in opposition to what follows, "Although I am free, I have made myself a slave." He uses the reflexive pronoun to emphasize his own personal willingness in all of it. He is saying, "I have done this to myself."

B. Paul's explanation of what it looks like (vv. 20-22).

What adjustments of accommodation did Paul make?

- To the Jews I became a Jew
- To those under the law I became as one under the law
- To those outside the law I became as one outside the law
- To the weak I became weak

C. Paul's motivation for giving up his "rights" (v. 23).

Every time Paul accommodated to the culture or status of individuals, he did so "in order to win more" people (v. 19b). Four times Paul uses the word "win" in 1 Corinthians and all four occurrences are in chapter 9:19, 20, 21, and 22. Paul had a passion to share with people of all cultures and religious backgrounds the blessings of the gospel (v.23). He provides for us the reason as to why he did what he did, "In order that I may win more."

The message of the cross must never be tampered with or adjusted. The venue through which the cross is preached can and must change as the culture around us changes.