

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 ¹⁶ For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. ¹⁸ What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. ¹⁹ For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; ²⁰ and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; ²¹ to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; ²² to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. ²³ Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

Sermon Theme: That We Might Gain Precious Souls for the Eternal Kingdom of God

1. Although we are free, we are willing to be of service to all others for the gospel's sake.
2. We are willing to become all things to all men for the gospel's sake.

In the name of Jesus Christ, whose ambassadors we are in this world, dear fellow redeemed;

Whenever the name of the apostle Paul is mentioned in Christian circles, besides the thought of him being the divinely inspired writer of so many letters in the Bible, what may well come to our minds is the thought – here is a Christian who gave his all for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the early days of the New Testament church, Paul tirelessly traveled many miles, visited many towns and cities, and lovingly bore witness of the gospel to many people. And in performing this very important work of the Lord Paul unselfishly and willingly made many sacrifices for the sake of the gospel.

When considering the many different types of individuals Paul shared the gospel with, there was no group of people the apostle overlooked or left out in his witnessing. Just to mention some of the groupings – there were the young and the old, males and females, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, masters and slaves, rulers and lowly citizens, professionals and common laborers, the respectable and those of ill repute, and of course the major groupings of the Jews and the Gentiles. While Paul had received the special calling of being an apostle to the Gentile nations, still he was mindful of the fact that the Lord Jesus commissioned His church to go out into all the world and make disciples of all nations. This command left nobody out when it came to the special work of gathering redeemed souls into the kingdom of God.

As the apostle Paul went out into the world giving of himself fully for the spread of the gospel, the Lord blessed his work in rich measure, with many being brought to faith in their Savior Jesus and with many Christian congregations having been established in different regions of the world.

When Paul wrote of his mission work, telling of what he said and did, he didn't do this in order that he might boast in himself or make a name for himself and thus be praised by others. Rather, his writings were intended to bring honor and glory to the name of God, and to spiritually benefit those who read them. Under the Holy Spirit's direction Paul wanted his

readers to understand that what he said and did in his mission work was all for the sake of the gospel.

These writings of Paul have been most certainly preserved to this day so that we might learn from them in our kingdom work. While our text reveals the work of an apostle, its message is surely intended to reveal important truths and set examples for all of us as Christians to follow in our individual and collective work of gathering precious souls into the eternal kingdom of God.

One important truth learned from the apostle is that as a freed man, Paul was willing to be of service to all others in order to gain them for the kingdom. Paul testified of the compelling force that lies behind the believer's desire to serve when he wrote, "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." Through faith in Jesus' redemptive work Paul and all of us who share the Christian belief are free, free from the diabolical power of the prince of darkness, free from the carnal and destructive worldly manner of living, free from the servitude of our own sinful flesh, and free from the dreadful curse of the law that would condemn us eternally on account of our sins. In short, our Savior Jesus has set us free from the road that leads to eternal destruction. And since we possess such a great and wonderful freedom through our Savior God, we are compelled by the redeeming love of Christ to be of service to others, the most important of which is seeking to be of help to them in learning of and finally experiencing this same freedom.

As the Corinthians considered Paul's gospel ministry in their midst, none of them could truthfully say of him that he was carrying out his work for selfish interests or for personal gain. Instead, it was clear to see that he had come to be of service to them. One very obvious illustration in this regard was the fact that Paul did not look to receive any monetary payment for his ministry among them. He worked part time as a tent maker so that he could "present the gospel of Christ without charge." Even though Paul would have had every right to expect compensation for his church work, nevertheless he was willing to make this personal sacrifice so that nothing would stand in the way of the spread of the gospel. In the case of Corinth, some could have hindered the gospel by saying that Paul was trying to take advantage of them had he expected to receive financial support for his ministry there.

Paul did all this quite willingly. For while as an apostle he felt duty bound to proclaim the gospel because of his divine calling, yet because of the tremendous sacrifices that Jesus lovingly and willingly made for him and all sinners as our Savior, Paul in turn was willing to make great sacrifices for the sake of the gospel. He voluntarily did this so that sinful man could enjoy the wonderful gifts of God's pardon for their sins and eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

Is not this the same kind of spirit of heart that the redeeming love of Christ works in us so that we want to be of service to all others, especially in the indispensable work of spreading the gospel both here and abroad? Are we not also willing to make sacrifices in order to remove anything that would hinder the gospel and to do everything we can to promote the spread of the saving gospel of Christ?

Paul revealed the great lengths he went to in order to reach the many different groups and types of people with the gospel when he said, "I have become all things to all men, that I

might by all means save some.” Please take another look at this Bible passage of our text listed as verse 22 in your bulletin and carefully consider the three ‘alls’ that Paul uses there. He said, “I have become **all things** (not some things) to **all men** (not some men), that I might by **all means** (not some means) save some.” No one was to be left out in his gospel outreach efforts. And Paul made use of whatever God pleasing means and measures available to him to reach them with the gospel.

Each individual and each group of people Paul came into contact with had their own particular background, culture, education, and personal characteristics, and needs. And in becoming all things to all men Paul made every attempt to find a common ground with all his listeners in order that he might bring them the good news of the gospel. This does not mean that he went along with and conformed to their worldliness of living or that he in anyway compromised the teachings of God so that it would satisfy their human way of thinking or that he made use of ways and means that would demean and degrade the gospel or dishonor the name of God. No. Paul came and met the people where they were at in life and spoke to them on their level and addressed their particular needs as he testified of the gospel in all its beauty and in all its truth and purity.

Paul cited some examples of this in the portion of Scripture before us today. In verse 20 he writes, “to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.” Since Paul was a Jew by race and grow up in the Jewish world, he knew well where they were at in life and how to relate to them. Yet, it is also helpful to know that in his becoming all things to the Jews Paul made the sacrifice of setting aside his use of certain Christian liberties for the sake of the gospel.

Knowing by faith that Jesus had perfectly observed and fully satisfied all the laws of Moses, Paul was well aware of the fact that he was no longer subject to the Old Testament ceremonial and civil laws. Paul, as well as any Jew had the Christian liberty to eat pork or shell fish which were previously forbidden and to not observe the Jewish festivals and holy days which were once required. But since most of the Jews Paul came into contact with were unaware of this freedom, he willingly did not make use his Christian liberties when he lived and worked among the Jews. Rather, he conformed to the Old Testament laws and customs so as not to offend the Jews and so that he might bring them the gospel of Christ. He did not compromise the gospel in doing this, but sought a common ground with the Jews for the sake of the gospel.

In verse 21 of our text, Paul writes of his becoming all things to the Gentiles, saying, “to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law.” Unlike the Jews, the Gentiles did not possess the revealed law of God. They did however have the natural knowledge of the moral law written in their hearts with their consciences either accusing or else excusing their ways.

When Paul lived and worked among the Gentiles, he did not live according to Jewish ways. Instead, he lived according to the law of Christ, namely the wonderful law of Christian love. Working with this spirit of heart, Paul sought a common ground with the Gentiles, and therefore conformed to the customs and ways of the Gentiles, provided they did not conflict with or go contrary to the will of God. Now the customs of the Gentiles were not what Paul

grow up with nor was he necessarily used to them. Still, he was willing to make the necessary adjustments, leaving behind what he was comfortable with so that he could reach the Gentiles where they were at in life with the gospel of Christ.

To change from what we have grown up with and are familiar with is never an easy thing, as the apostle Paul could well attest to. However, if we as Christians are to become all things to all men that we might by all means lead them to Christ as did Paul, the law of Christian love would move us to be willing to change for the gospel's sake whenever and wherever it would be necessary.

We might think of some of the changes that took place in the past in churches of our respective ethnic heritage for the sake of the gospel. For example, there was the time when the Norwegian and German Lutheran Churches changed the language in which the worship services were conducted from the native tongue of the old country to English. They did this because more and more people were speaking English. It was realized that if the English speaking people were to benefit from the preaching of God's Word and the worship of His name, it would be necessary that it be done in a language they could understand. And so the change was made for the sake of the gospel.

In becoming all things to all men Paul also writes in verse 22 of our text, "to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak." In studying this verse, some have understood Paul's reference to the weak as being Christians who are as yet lacking in their spiritual understanding and are still weak in faith. In this respect, whenever Paul encountered the weak, he was mindful of and sensitive to their weaknesses. He became all things to the weak by initially refraining from the use of his Christian liberties in their midst so as not to be an offense to them. He lovingly bore with their weaknesses and patiently instructed them so that in time they grew more and more in their knowledge and faith in the Christian way.

This is something we need to keep in mind and put into practice such as when it comes to seeking a change in our congregational life in areas that are a matter of Christian liberty and Christian judgment. Never would we want to institute change in such a manner as to injure the souls of the weak by causing an offense. The law of Christian love would move us to be considerate and patient with one another in this regard.

The apostle Paul was, by the grace of God, truly a great missionary. The Lord richly blessed him with maturity of Christian knowledge and faith, with a strong mission zeal, with a fervent love for precious souls Jesus died to save, and with godly wisdom and good judgment as he reached out to the many with the gospel of salvation. Most certainly he has set a good example for us to follow in the important work of gaining souls for the eternal kingdom of God. May the Lord richly bless our efforts in this important work and continue to bless our Christian fellowship for the sake of the gospel. Amen.