

# A Comparison of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 “know nothing except Christ crucified” and 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 “become all things to all men”

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## Introduction

The Christian congregation in the city of Corinth was in desperate need for spiritual growth. Just look at the problems that plagued this group of believers:

- 1) Divisions (Chapts. 1-4)
- 2) Laxity in church discipline (Chapt. 5)
- 3) Lawsuits between fellow Christians before unbelieving judges (6:1-11)
- 4) Blatant immorality (6:12-20)
- 5) Misunderstandings about being single and married (Chapt. 7)
- 6) Problems with food sacrificed to idols and idol feasts (Chapts. 8, 10)
- 7) Misbehavior in worship and in celebrating the Lord’s Supper (Chapt. 11)
- 8) Abuse of spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues (Chapts. 12-14)
- 9) Denial of the physical resurrection of Christ (Chapt. 15)

And we think we have problems in our churches! We think our people need to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18)!

It would have been so easy for the apostle Paul to give up on this spiritually weak group of people. But notice what he does instead. He calls them a church. He tells them they are sanctified. Paul thanks God for them (Can you believe that? Especially considering their situation?) He praises God for the grace shown to the Corinthians in Christ. Nor do they lack any spiritual gift in Christ.

After his brief introduction, Paul goes directly into dealing with the problem of divisions and cliques along party lines within the congregation. The apostle appeals to unity—not the superficial worldly kind, but true unity in their faith and confession: “*I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought,*” 1 Cor. 1:10. He appeals to their agreement together in all the teachings of Holy Scripture they had learned from him.

Although Paul appealed for complete unity, the heart and core of his proclamation was the message of the cross: “*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God,*” 1 Cor. 1:22-24. This crucified and risen Christ “*has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption,*” 1 Cor. 1:30.

Paul then reminds the Corinthians how they first met—in either November A.D. 51 (Lenski) or A.D. 52 (T. Zahn)—while he was on his second missionary journey. Paul’s initial work in Corinth is described for us in Acts 18:1-18, as he came from Athens.

## *1 Corinthians 2:1-5*

### 1 Corinthians 2:1

Καὶ<sup>1</sup> ἔλθων πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ἦλθον οὐ καθ' ὑπεροχὴν<sup>2,3</sup> λόγου<sup>4</sup> ἢ σοφίας<sup>5</sup> καταγγέλλων ὑμῖν τὸ μαρτύριον<sup>6</sup> τοῦ θεοῦ.

NIV When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

**And I, when I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God as a superior person of word or wisdom.**

The apostle Paul continues the train of thought he began in 1 Cor. 1:18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” When he came to Corinth for the first time, he didn’t tell them what God had done for them in Christ with the rhetorical eloquence and philosophical wisdom that was so admired in Corinthian society at that time. It’s not that the apostle wasn’t capable of such rhetoric.<sup>7</sup> Also note that in spite of their spiritual weakness and misunderstanding, in spite of their many serious congregational problems, Paul still calls them “brothers.”

Concerning τοῦ θεοῦ R.C.H. Lenski writes:

The genitive ‘of God’ may be subjective: God did the testifying; it is scarcely objective: the testimony that deals with God, which is too general an expression to indicate the gospel. One may regard this as a genitive of origin: the testimony God has imposed on his witnesses. Then, too, ‘testimony’ becomes significant, for every testimony given unto us must be repeated simply as it is. It dare not be altered or embellished with strange oratory or wisdom of our own.<sup>8</sup>

But we would agree more with Simon Kistemaker when he says:

A subjective genitive means that God is the author of this testimony; the objective genitive makes Paul the proclaimer of this testimony about God. In view of a similar construction (1:6), we interpret the genitive as both subjective and objective: God is the originator of the testimony and Paul proclaims it and teaches the Corinthians about God.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup>καὶ ἰν καὶ γὰρ attaches the new section to the previous one as it also tends in the same direction. R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians, Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1946. p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> ἢ ὑπεροχῇ- superiority; καθ’ ὑ. - as a superior person.

<sup>3</sup>καθ’ ὑπεροχῇν- We reflect Robertson’s grammatical comment in our translation: “Most commentators connect the words with καταγγέλλων rather than ἦλθον.” Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911. p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> λόγος -eloquent and persuasive oration after the fashion of the Greek orators. Lenski, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> σοφία -worldly wisdom and philosophy. Lenski, p. 87.

The nouns *eloquence* and *wisdom* describe the verbal skills and the mental acumen of a speaker. The two expressions refer to the words that come from a speaker’s lips and the thoughts that formulate words into sentences...In this context, Paul refers not to a deficiency in his own abilities but to the excesses of Greek orators and philosophers. Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary--Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, n.d. p. 73.

The genitives are exegetical or qualitative: Paul did not at all preach with an excellency that consists in *logos* or in *sofiva*. Any use of these means would have exalted them above the gospel, and the Corinthians might have been attracted by these means and not by the gospel. Lenski, p. 87

<sup>6</sup> Nestle-martuvrion, UBS- musthvrion. Here we follow Nestle because of what appears to be wider attestation.

<sup>7</sup>One is not to stress Paul’s language in 1 Cor. 2:1-4 into a denial that he could use the literary style. It is rather a rejection of the bombastic rhetoric that the Corinthians liked and the rhetorical art that was so common from *Thucydides* to *Chrysostom*. A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934. p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Lenski, p. 88

<sup>9</sup> Kistemaker, p. 72

We appreciated how Gordon Fee in his commentary puts the verses under our consideration in context. He is especially succinct in his summaries:

The paragraph is replete with themes from 1:17-25, signaling its closest possible ties to what has preceded. The argument has two parts (vv. 1-2, 3-5), both of which begin with ‘and I.’ The first two verses, which pick up the language of 1:17 and 23, remind them of the *content* of his preaching, but now emphasizing that it was a deliberate act on his part. Vv. 3-4 then remind them of the *form* of the preacher and his preaching, which bears the same character as the message itself—‘weakness.’ Nonetheless, as in 1:22-25, in this ‘weakness’ the power of God is at work, now expressed in terms of the Spirit. A final purpose clause in v. 5 gives the reason for all this, that their faith might be of God and in God alone and not in human wisdom.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout his commentary, Fee evaluates the New International Version translation. At times he criticizes the NIV, and at other times, he praises it. Note his words here:

“Not according to excellence of word or wisdom.” ...The NIV is misleading in suggesting that “excellence” is an adjective modifying “wisdom,” and especially in translating the phrase “superior wisdom.” “According to excellence” most likely refers to his manner of preaching.<sup>11</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 2:2**

οὐ γὰρ<sup>12</sup> ἔκρινά τι εἰδέναι<sup>13</sup> ἐν ὑμῖν εἰ μὴ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ<sup>14</sup> τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον<sup>15</sup>.  
NIV For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

**For I did not intend to know anything in your midst except Jesus Christ and this one who has been crucified.**

The focus of Paul’s message to the Corinthians was the person Jesus Christ—the Savior, the Old Testament promised Messiah (“Anointed One”)—and how he was crucified for our salvation. This is the perfect summary of the entire gospel, and a more elaborate phrase than what Paul said earlier in 1:23, “*Christ crucified.*”

It has often been speculated that this sentence is to be understood as his (somewhat negative) response to the recent ministry in Athens, as recorded in Acts 17:16-34. The problem with this suggestion is that (1) it misreads the evidence of Acts as being a failure of sorts, and (2) it assumes that this resolve on the part of Paul was a change of strategy, or a return to a former strategy, neither of which is implied by what is actually said.<sup>16</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 2:3**

<sup>10</sup> Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987. p. 89.

<sup>11</sup> Fee, p. 90

<sup>12</sup> The ‘for’ that begins this sentence is explanatory; Paul is offering reasons for the behavior outlined in v. 1. Fee, p. 92

<sup>13</sup> But the giving up of anything else is far more powerfully expressed by εἰδέναι...than if Paul had said λεγέιν or λαλεῖν. He was not disposed, when among the Corinthians, to be *conscious* of anything else but Christ. Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistle to the Corinthians, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1884, 1983 reprint. p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Adverbial or exegetical use - “that is, even.” James Hope Moulton and Nigel Turner, A Grammar of New Testament Greek, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963. p. 335. BDF translates it as “that is to say,” comparing it to the Latin *idque*. F. Blass, A. Debrunner, Robert W. Funk, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975. p. 228f. Robertson states “The exegetic or explicative use of καὶ occupies a middle ground between ‘also’ and ‘and.’” A.T. Robertson, p. 1181.

<sup>15</sup> The emphasis is on the participle ἐσταυρωμένον the cross always offends. The perfect participle states the past fact of the crucifixion and then the enduring effect of that fact: Christ, once crucified, is such forever. Lenski, p. 89

<sup>16</sup> Fee, p. 92

καὶ γὰρ<sup>17</sup> ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ καὶ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ πολλῶ ἐγενόμην πρὸς ὑμᾶς,

NIV I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

**And I, in weakness and in fear and in great trembling, I was with you,**

Paul continues the description of his preaching among the Corinthians. As far as Paul personally was concerned, instead of being a superior person of word or wisdom, he was with them in weakness. He was afraid to the point of trembling.

...For him there was a genuine correspondence between his own personal weaknesses and his gospel (cf. Col. 1:24). At the heart of his preaching stood the “weakness of God” (1:25), the story of a crucified Messiah (v. 2). His own weakness served as a further visible demonstration of the same message, but even more to demonstrate that the message was of divine, not human, origin... Thus the apostle regularly glories in his weaknesses, not because he “enjoyed ill health” but because they were a sure evidence that the power was of God and not of himself. Apparently this became a point of contention between Paul and this church...<sup>18</sup>

From his other epistles, we learn that Paul had to cope with physical ailments; he frequently endured punishment and affliction (2 Cor. 11:23-28; 12:7) and he was ill during his visit to the Galatians (Gal. 4:13-14). We assume that Paul was a rather unattractive man, perhaps small of stature (2 Cor. 10:10) and plagued with poor eyesight (see Gal. 4:15; 6:11).<sup>19</sup>

ἐγενόμην πρὸς ὑμᾶς- Lenski follows A.T. Robertson in his interpretation of this expression:

The phrase πρὸς ὑμᾶς suggests Paul’s facing the Corinthians in his poor condition; Robertson calls πρὸς the face-to-face preposition. Run down as he was, he was a poor figure to come πρὸς, face to face with people who admired oratory and philosophic presentation. Paul feared and trembled that his condition might work against the blessed message he had to bring.<sup>20</sup>

But Fee is willing to consider either “I came to you,” or “I was with you.”

The verb can mean either “I came to you,” emphasizing that this is how he was when he arrived, or “I was with you,” suggesting that he manifested “weakness” in his ongoing relationship with them.<sup>21</sup>

In our translation we have followed the lead of Lenski and Robertson, “*I was with you.*”

## **1 Corinthians 2:4**

καὶ ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς<sup>22</sup> ἀνθρωπίνης σοφίας λόγοις<sup>23</sup> ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀποδείξει<sup>24</sup> πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως,

<sup>17</sup> With another “and I” Paul resumes the description of his preaching; but now it focuses less on the form of preaching and more directly on the “form” of the preacher. Fee, p. 92.

<sup>18</sup> Fee, p. 93

<sup>19</sup> Kistemaker, p. 74

<sup>20</sup> Lenski, p. 91.

<sup>21</sup> Fee, p. 92

<sup>22</sup> The singular word πῖνον" or πεινον", which is found nowhere else, is the equivalent of the classical πικανον", which Josephus (Ant. VIII, ix.1) uses of the plausible words of the lying prophet of 1 Kings xiii. Arch. Robertson, p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> πειθοῖς ἀνθρωπίνης σοφίας λόγοις- seems to have a wider attestation than the UBS choice which omits ἀνθρωπίνης.

NIV My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,

**And my word and my proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom common to man, but in proof of the Spirit and power,**

Paul now gives the positive way he was with them. The words Paul spoke to them were not effective because of his persuasiveness, but because of the power of the Holy Spirit.

What's the powerful demonstration of the Spirit? Some say signs and wonders. More likely it refers to their actual conversion, with its concomitant gift of the Spirit, which was probably evidenced by spiritual gifts, especially tongues...The evidence lies with the Corinthians themselves and their own experience of the Spirit as they responded to the message of the gospel.<sup>25</sup>

ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου –

His preaching is just described by their term, *logos*... Although it was not to *their* liking, he does have a *logos*, the *logos* of the cross... But unlike the Corinthians, who attached wisdom to *logos*, Paul attaches *kerygma* (“preaching” or “proclamation”... *Logos* and *kerygma* therefore probably refer to the content and form of Paul's actual delivery (hence “message and preaching”)... But his preaching did not thereby lack persuasion. What it lacked was the kind of persuasion found among the sophists and rhetoricians, where the power lay in the person and his delivery. Paul's preaching, on the other hand, despite his personal appearance and whatever its actual form, produced the desired results, namely it brought about the faith of the Corinthians.<sup>26</sup>

More probably, οJ lovgo" looks back to I.18, and means the Gospel which the apostle preached, while khvrugma is the act of proclamation, viewed, not as a process (khvruxi"), but as a whole.<sup>27</sup>

πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως-

...In Paul the terms “Spirit” and “power” are at times nearly interchangeable...To speak of the Spirit is automatically to speak of power...The combination here is probably very close to a hendiadys (the use of two words to express the same reality: “the Spirit, that is, Power”), hence the NIV's “the Spirit's power.”<sup>28</sup>

The genitives are either subjective, “demonstration proceeding from and wrought by the Spirit and power of God,” or qualifying, “demonstration consisting in the spirit and power of God,” as distinct from persuasion produced by mere cleverness.<sup>29</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 2:5**

ἵνα<sup>30</sup> ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν μὴ ᾖ<sup>31</sup> ἐν<sup>32</sup> σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ' ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ.

<sup>24</sup> The Greek word is used of producing proofs in an argument in court. Paul's preaching was marked by the convincing demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. *Concordia Self-Study Bible: New International Version*, Robert G. Hoerber, General Editor, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984. p. 1748.

<sup>25</sup> Fee, p. 95

<sup>26</sup> Fee, p. 94

<sup>27</sup> Arch. Robertson, p. 32

<sup>28</sup> Fee, p. 95

<sup>29</sup> Arch. Robertson, p. 33

NIV so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

**that your faith may not be in men's wisdom but in God's power.**

Why did Paul say in verse 4 that his words and “*proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom common to man, but in proof of the Spirit and power*”? Verse 5 tells us: so their faith would be based on God's power rather than on the wisdom of human beings.

Paul uses the plural noun *men* [ἀνθρώπων] to illustrate that in Corinth many people are dispensing their own insight and wisdom.<sup>33</sup>

*σοφία ἀνθρώπων*- Denotes many men, and not only many as found in one generation but in successive generations. Their “wisdom” is not constant by any means, it changes completely from age to age.<sup>34</sup>

This comment from Lenski reminds me of how every few months there's an article in a major news magazine about how scientists have changed their views concerning the origins of the universe!

Finally, Fee offers one application to religious life today:

The polished oratory sometimes heard in American pulpits, where the sermon itself seems to be the goal of what is said, makes one wonder whether the text has been heard at all. Paul's own point needs a fresh hearing. What he is rejecting is not preaching, not even persuasive preaching; rather, it is the real danger in all preaching--self-reliance.<sup>35</sup>

### Observations and Applications

It may be tempting to think the crucifixion of Jesus is all Paul talked about to the Corinthians and to all the others he came into contact with during his missionary journeys. But we know the apostle took Christ's words seriously in Matthew 28:20, where, in his divine mission statement for the New Testament Church, Jesus commanded us not only to baptize all nations, but to also teach “*them to obey everything I have commanded you.*” We know Paul took Christ's words seriously because of what he said to the Ephesian elders at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem, “*I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God,*” Acts 20:27 NKJV. In the epistles of 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul covers a large spectrum of Christian doctrine.

Paul doesn't just write about Christ's crucifixion in his divinely-inspired writings. But everything he put on paper centered and focused on Christ. Paul connected everything he wrote and said to Jesus.

We like to talk and write about the great commission of Matthew 28:18-20. But so often, when we talk about our Lord's command to go and make disciples of all nations, we put the period (.) after the word “*nations,*” and

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<sup>30</sup> ἵνα – With the concluding purpose clause of v. 5 the argument that began in 1:18 now comes full circle. The message of the cross, which is folly to the “wise,” is the saving power of God to those who believe. Fee, p. 96. ...The purpose clause...includes all that is stated in v. 1-4. Lenski, p. 92.

<sup>31</sup> μή ἤ – Instead of connecting the negative particle mhv with i{na, “lest,” Paul connects it with the verb mh; h\, “may not be.” The effect of this construction is to make the statement regarding human wisdom more weighty and independent: “may not be in the sphere of men's wisdom.” Lenski, p. 93.

<sup>32</sup> ἐν – The preposition marks the medium or sphere in which faith has its root...We often express the same idea by “depend on” rather than by “rooted in,”; that your faith may not depend upon wisdom of men, but upon power of God. Arch. Robertson, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Kistemaker, p. 77

<sup>34</sup> Lenski, p. 93

<sup>35</sup> Fee, p. 96

we tend to forget about the divinely appointed means God has given us for carrying out this privileged work. It's tempting to become so wrapped up in demographic studies, outreach methods, the latest evangelism techniques, etc., that we forget about simple baptizing and teaching. This is not to mean that demographics, methods and techniques are not important. Such things have their place. But God has commanded us to administer his sacraments and proclaim his Word.

This is not only how God the Holy Spirit makes disciples through us, but this is also how those who have become his followers remain his pupils. To share the sacraments and teach his Word is how we grow our people spiritually. We are doing our people a disservice if we only preach and teach generally and generically. Our people need to learn about all the facets of creation and how it compares to current evolutionary thought. We need to teach them what Scripture really says about the end-times, and that there's no such thing as a rapture or a millennium as the dispensational premillennialists would like to tell us. Our people need to understand why we believe the office of the papacy is the Antichrist. We need to instruct a new generation on the doctrine of fellowship (and I don't just mean getting together for a pot-luck supper). The members of our flock need to learn how the doctrine of election has been given for our comfort, and that the faith we now have is the result (not the cause) of our being predestined in eternity in Christ. We need to discuss again and again the Scriptural roles of men and women, in view of the fact we live in a society permeated with feminism.

These teachings, and all the rest, are what Jesus referred to when he commanded us to teach the nations "*to obey everything I have commanded you.*" What Paul means when he says in our text "*I did not intend to know anything in your midst except Jesus Christ and this one who has been crucified*" is that all of these doctrines must be taught, discussed, viewed and considered in connection with Christ. **He is the ultimate focus.**

### *1 Corinthians 9:19-27*

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul writes of freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols, but not if such eating offends a weak brother (or sister). At the beginning of chapter 9, the apostle defends his ministry and considers how it's his right to make a living from it. But he doesn't use that right because he doesn't want to hinder the gospel of Christ. Paul preaches the good news because he is compelled to do so: "*Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*" 1 Cor. 9:16. Paul's reward was simply to offer the gospel "*free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it,*" 1 Cor. 9:18.

Joel Gerlach wrote of Paul's non-use of his rights:

...He reminds them, while we *had* the right to make claims on you, we didn't *use* the right. And the reason he didn't, Paul insists, is because he didn't want to put any obstacle in the way of the Gospel. He did not want any man to be able to point to a single thing in Paul and then use it as an excuse for not accepting Paul's message about Jesus. What a marvelous example of self-effacing restraint. What an incredible concern for souls!<sup>36</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 9:19**

*'Ελεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ<sup>37</sup> πάντων πᾶσιν ἐμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα<sup>38</sup>, ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω·*

<sup>36</sup> Joel C. Gerlach, "*The Art of Being All Things to All Men... While in the World, but Not of It,*" Paper presented at the Arizona-California District Teacher's Conference held at King of Kings Lutheran Church, Garden Grove, California, November, 1970. p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> The *ἐκ* expresses more strongly than *ἀπό* (Rom. vii.3) that he is freed out of all dependence on others; he is extricated from entangling ties. Arch. Robertson, p. 190, in a footnote.

It is only here that *ελεύθερος* occurs with *ἐκ* elsewhere (Rom. vii.3; compare Rom. vi.18, 22, viii. 2,21) and in Greek writers with *ἀπό*. Meyer, p. 210.

NIV Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

**For being free from all, I enslaved myself to all, that I may gain the more.**

Fee lays out for us the structure of 9:19-23 in a way that will help us better understand the Spirit-intended meaning of these words:

The *structure* of the paragraph should be noted. Vv. 19-22 form a unit, for which v. 19 serves as the introduction and 22b as the conclusion. (For the possibility that this is an expression of chiasm, see N. W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* [Chapel Hill, 1942], p. 147; if so, it is in form only, not in content, as Weiss, 244, observes.) The four groups illustrate v. 19 and the “all things to all people” of v. 22b. The two middle terms (about law) are qualified with a *μη ὄν αὐτὸς* (“not being myself”). All six sentences conclude with a *ἵνα*-clause, the first five with the verb *κερδαίνω*, the final, generalizing one with the more common synonym, *σώζω*. V. 23 then serves as the double reason for all this: for the sake of the gospel; so that Paul might share in its blessings. Thus:

Intro.: Being free from all, I became slave to all.

*in order to* win the many.

- 1) to the Jews, as a Jew  
*in order to* win Jews;
- 2) to those under the law, as under the law  
(although not really myself under the law)  
*in order to* win those under law;
- 3) to those not under the law, as not under the law  
(although not lawless)  
*in order to* win those not under law;
- 4) to the weak, weak  
*in order to* win the weak.

Concl.: I have become all things to all people,  
*in order* by all means *to* save some.

Reason: I do all things(1) for the sake of the gospel.  
(2) *in order to* share its blessings.<sup>39</sup>

Paul was free. He belonged to no one. He made his own living. No one could use material support as a way of manipulating and controlling him and his ministry.<sup>40</sup> But he still made himself a slave to everyone, that he might gain as many as possible for eternal salvation in Christ. When Paul made himself a slave, this was a voluntary act of a free man.<sup>41</sup> Freedom wasn't his goal, however; the salvation of others was.<sup>42</sup> Fee writes concerning Paul's slavery:

In this context his becoming slave of all is to be understood in light of the examples that follow, thus referring to his willingness to accommodate himself to whatever social setting he found himself in, so as “to win as many as possible.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> The aorist is particularly significant. Paul is not here speaking in generalities about his *modus operandi*; rather, he is defending past actions. He is known to have conducted himself differently in differing social settings; his way of speaking about those actions is that he made himself a slave to everyone in order to win them to Christ. Fee, p. 426 footnote.

<sup>39</sup> Fee, p. 423 footnote.

<sup>40</sup> Fee, P. 426.

<sup>41</sup> Lenski, p. 374.

<sup>42</sup> Fee, p. 426.

<sup>43</sup> Fee, p. 426f.



Paul was fulfilling Christ's words to his disciples in Matthew 20:25-27—

*“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

What Paul expresses here is a scriptural paradox that Martin Luther used in his treatise, *“Die Freiheit eines Christenmenschen.”* Luther expressed the paradox in these words:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.<sup>44</sup>

Luther went beyond the missionary setting of these words to establish from them the principles that govern the entire conduct of the believer.<sup>45</sup> But he did have some timely words in his treatise that have some bearing on our discussion at hand, particularly when it comes to Christian freedom:

It is clear then, that a Christian has all that he needs in faith and needs no works to justify him; and if he has no need of works, he has no need of the law; and if he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law. It is true that “the law is not laid down for the just” [I Tim. 1:9]. This is that Christian liberty, our faith, which does not induce us to live in idleness or wickedness but makes the law and works unnecessary for any man's righteousness and salvation.<sup>46</sup>

Throughout our ministries we are faced with all sorts of challenges. As we continue on through these words of the apostle Paul, inspired by God the Holy Spirit, let's not forget the humanly insurmountable challenges he was faced with, and how he met those challenges head on:

Paul had the difficult task of working in two different cultures: that of Jewish Christians who lived by the Mosaic law, and that of Gentile Christians who were free from the law of Moses. He had to preach the gospel to both groups while trying to bring them together in one community of believers and serving as a faithful pastor to those Christians who had weak consciences. Paul was in the unenviable position of giving leadership by speaking to all the issues that divided the believers in Corinth. For this reason he wanted to be free so that he could be of service to all. Having demonstrated his desire to be free as a preacher of the gospel, he discloses the strategy he employs in winning people for Christ.<sup>47</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 9:20**

*καὶ<sup>48</sup> ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις<sup>49</sup> ὡς Ἰουδαῖος, ἵνα Ἰουδαίους κερδήσω· τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον, μὴ ὦν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον,<sup>50</sup> ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον κερδήσω·*

<sup>44</sup> Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, Edited by Harold J. Grimm, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957, p. 7. *Christian Liberty*, or *The Freedom of a Christian*, was one of three treatises Luther published in the latter half of 1520. *The Address to the German Nobility* attacked the authority of the papacy over secular rulers and denied the pope was the final interpreter of Scripture, among other things. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* attacked the sacramental system of Roman Catholicism. But *The Freedom of a Christian* was written in a conciliatory spirit. It contained a positive and unequivocal statement of Luther's evangelical theology as applied to the Christian life. Luther/Grimm, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Werner H. Franzmann, “*Being Made All Things to All Men—1 Corinthians 9:19-22*,” An essay delivered to the Thirty-Third Convention of the Wisconsin Synod, Saginaw, Michigan, August 10-17, 1955, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Luther, p. 12f.

<sup>47</sup> Kistemaker, p. 304.

<sup>48</sup> Epexegetical. Lenski, p. 376.

<sup>49</sup> Names of peoples do not require the article any more than personal names...except 1 Cor. 9:20, where Paul must have some special occasion in mind like Timothy's circumcision. Moulton-Turner, p. 169.

In the epistles of Paul... Ἰουδ. Does not have the article except in 1 Cor. 9:20... BDF, p. 137.

<sup>50</sup> The UBS choice of the variant seems to have the widest attestation: *μὴ ὦν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον*.

NIV 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.

**And I became to the Jews as a Jew, that I may gain Jews; to those under law as under law, not being myself under law, that I may gain those under law;**

Paul explains how he enslaves himself to everyone, “*that I may gain the more.*” To the physical descendants of Abraham, Paul becomes like a Jew, so he can win the Jews.

Paul begins with his own people and abides by the principle “first to the Jew and then to the Gentile.”

Paul was born a Jew and was a Hebrew of the Hebrews (Phil. 3:5). But when he writes that he became a Jew to the Jews, he implies that by becoming a follower of Jesus he is a new creation (II Cor. 5:17) and that he is no longer a Jew or a Greek.<sup>51</sup>

How did Paul become like the Jews and like those under the law? If anyone knew what it meant to be Jewish and under the law, it was Paul (cf. Phil. 3:4-6). We have several examples in the book of Acts of how Paul adapted himself to Jewish customs when he tried to win the Jews for Christ. He had Timothy circumcised, Acts 16:3; he made a Nazirite vow to thank God for deliverance, Acts 18:18; he joined four Nazirites in their purification rites and he paid their expenses for a sacrificial offering, Acts 21:23,24,26.<sup>52</sup>

These people were scrupulous about legal prescriptions, and Paul accommodates himself to them when he is preaching the gospel by avoiding anything that might arouse their antagonism. He thus observed their laws regarding food, drink and similar matters.<sup>53</sup>

When Paul mentions the Jews, he’s focusing primarily on nationality. When he writes about “*those under law,*” he’s referring primarily to religion. The apostle makes this distinction because there were Gentiles who placed themselves under the law of Moses (proselytes of the gate and proselytes of righteousness).

We also have a parenthetical remark: “*not being myself under law.*” “The parenthesis is remarkable as showing how completely St. Paul had broken with Judaism.”<sup>54</sup>

The difference...between his own behavior and that of his social companions is not the behavior itself, which will be identical to the observer, but in the reason for it. The latter abstain because they are “under the law”; it is a matter of religious obligation. Paul abstains because he loves those under the law and wants to convert them to Christ. Despite appearance, the differences are as night and day.<sup>55</sup>

Werner Franzmann reminds us what Paul meant when he said he was not under law:

...Paul was free from that law by virtue of his relationship to Christ. Like all believers, he was not under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:14). Therefore, through this addition, Paul tells the Corinthians and us: Let no one mistake my actions. I freely subject myself to the law. But that does not mean that I yield any of my liberty in Christ.<sup>56</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 9:21**

*τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος, μὴ ὦν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλ’ ἔννομος Χριστοῦ, ἵνα κερδάνω τοὺς ἀνόμους·*

<sup>51</sup>Kistemaker, p. 305.

<sup>52</sup>Kistemaker, p. 305f.

<sup>53</sup>Lenski, p. 376.

<sup>54</sup>Arch. Robertson, p. 191.

<sup>55</sup>Fee, p. 429.

<sup>56</sup>Franzmann, page 2.

NIV 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.

**To those without law as without law, not being without the law of God but subject to the law of Christ, that I may gain those without law;**

*“Those without law”* are the Gentiles. As Paul reaches out to Gentiles with the gospel, as he tries to gain them for Christ, he becomes like *“one not having the law”* (NIV) himself. “He mingled freely with them and disregarded all Jewish observances which he followed at other times.”<sup>57</sup>

But the Corinthians shouldn't think Paul was lawless—instead, he was subject to Christ's law.

The Jews are under the law outwardly and inwardly; Paul is not. The Gentiles are inwardly under the law, and only outwardly are they free from it; Paul is free from both outwardly and inwardly. The gospel gave him this freedom. But through this very freedom from the law the gospel put Paul within the law. The law, once a relentless master and tyrant, is through the gospel now a beneficent friend and servant to Paul. Freely, of his own volition, Paul, the gospel Christian, delights to do the works of the law. As such a man he moves among both Jews and Gentiles. With perfect liberty he uses ceremonial regulations when he is among Jews, and with the same liberty he discards all such regulations when he is among Gentiles; he follows both courses of conduct in order to win as many as possible for the gospel.<sup>58</sup>

In this verse Paul engages in a play on words with a[nomo" and e[nnomo". Fee writes that Paul can scarcely resist a play on words. Among Gentiles he behaves as one who is *anomos* (not under Jewish law), but he is not thereby to be considered *anomos* (“lawless”=“godless, wicked”; cf. 1 Tim. 1:9), which point is made by adding the qualifier “toward God.” Indeed, he goes on, I am *ennomos* (lit. “in law”=subject to law) toward Christ. His point is plain: He wishes no misunderstanding of the word *anomos*, which would ordinarily mean to behave in a godless way.<sup>59</sup>

Kistemaker writes concerning “the law of Christ”-

Engaged in a play on the term *law*, Paul is saying that he is free from the law by which the Jews sought salvation. But now that salvation has come through Jesus Christ, he subjects himself to the law of Christ. Through Christ, Paul's view of the law has changed. He no longer seeks salvation in relation to the law but now he wants to keep the law to show his gratitude to Christ.<sup>60</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 9:22**

*ἔγενόμην τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής, ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω· τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω.*

NIV To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

**I became to the weak (as) weak, that I may gain the weak; to all I have become everything, that at least I may save some.**

<sup>57</sup> Lenski, p. 377.

<sup>58</sup> Lenski, p. 378.

<sup>59</sup> Fee, p. 429f.

<sup>60</sup> Kistemaker, p. 308.

When it came to those whose consciences were weak, Paul became weak. Paul did not exercise his Christian freedom in such things as eating meat sacrificed to idols. In a round-about way he comes full circle by now discussing his relationship to the weak, where he left off at the end of 1 Corinthians 8.<sup>61</sup>

Among the commentators it appears generally accepted that Paul is referring to those who are “weak and underdeveloped in knowledge and faith.”<sup>62</sup> But Kistemaker suggests that Paul may have also been thinking of the economically weak.<sup>63</sup> Werner Franzmann goes so far as to say the weak were the unconverted.<sup>64</sup>

Paul then summarizes what he has been saying in verses 20-22 by saying: “*to all I have become everything, that at least I may save some.*” Note the string of “alls”—*πᾶσιν πάντα—πάντως*. Lenski says it well:

Note the beautiful paronomasia between *πᾶσι- πάντα- πάντως* -and *πάντα* in v. 23. Paul spreads out his arms and opens wide his heart of love by the use of these four terms, all of which mean “all - all.” In contrast with these four “all” terms he writes save “some.” Although he is not less than an apostle he knows that he will be able to save only “some.” ...we, too, find that we can save only “some.”<sup>65</sup>

Paul preached, counseled and encouraged. He worked hard to present the gospel to everyone. But the apostle knew the actual work of salvation belonged to God. “Not he, but God effects salvation (Phil. 2:13).”<sup>66</sup>

“*To all I have become everything.*” Both Lenski and Fee go out of their way to show that when Paul accommodated himself to the people he was working with, he never compromised the Word. But in matters that didn’t matter (adiaphora), Paul became all things to all men.<sup>67</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 9:23**

*πάντα δὲ ποιῶ διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον,<sup>68</sup> ἵνα συγκοινωνῶς<sup>69</sup> αὐτοῦ<sup>70</sup> γένωμαι.*

NIV I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

**And everything I do for the gospel, that I may become its participant.**

<sup>61</sup> Kistemaker, p. 308.

<sup>62</sup> Lenski, p. 380.

<sup>63</sup> Kistemaker, p. 309.

<sup>64</sup> Franzmann, p. 3f.

<sup>65</sup> Lenski, p. 380.

<sup>66</sup> Kistemaker, p. 309.

<sup>67</sup> It should not be necessary, yet probably is, to point out the fact that in accommodating himself to the standpoint of his missionary subjects Paul never descended to a mere pleasing of men or to connivance with their false religious notions and their sinful practices...Paul’s task was not an easy one...The danger is always present that we may either yield too much to love, which then ceases to be love, or that we may forget something of wisdom, which then lands us in folly, Lenski, p. 381.

Whereas he is intransigent on matters that affect the gospel itself, whether theological or behavioral (e.g., 1:18-25; 5:1-5, etc.), that same concern for the saving power of the gospel is what causes him to become all things to all people in matters that don’t count, Fee, p. 431.

<sup>68</sup> “For the sake of the gospel” is meant subjectively: for the saving success of the gospel among men generally, including also myself, Lenski, p. 381.

<sup>69</sup> *συγκοινωνῶς*...a term that is used only here by Paul: one who shares with others in the saving fellowship of the gospel. Lenski, p. 382.

<sup>70</sup> *αὐτοῦ* - this pronoun in the genitive case refers to the gospel and is dependent on the noun *συγκοινωνῶς*; (partner), Kistemaker, p. 312.

Prior to verse 23 Paul's expressed desire was to save others. The gospel he proclaimed offers salvation to all. He personally wanted to participate in the gospel's blessings.

Up to this point all the purpose clauses reveal only Paul's desire to gain and save others. Now we learn that this purpose extends also to Paul himself.<sup>71</sup>

Even in speaking of his own salvation he does not regard it as the main thing, or as something apart by itself. Salvation is offered by the Gospel to all; and he must strive to be one of those who receive it.<sup>72</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 9:24**

*Οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι οἱ ἐν σταδίῳ<sup>73</sup> τρέχοντες πάντες μὲν τρέχουσιν, εἷς δὲ λαμβάνει τὸ βραβεῖον; οὕτως<sup>74</sup> τρέχετε ἵνα καταλάβητε.<sup>75</sup>*

NIV 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.

**Don't you know that, on the one hand, all those running in a stadium are running, on the other hand, one receives the prize? So run that you may win.**

This paragraph [vv.24-27] is transitional; it brings the long excursus of chapt. 9 to its conclusion and at the same time prepares for a return to the argument against going to cultic meals (10:1-22).<sup>76</sup>

“Don't you know?” Of course the Corinthians knew that only one who ran in the stadium received the prize. Corinth held its own Isthmian games every other year, which were second only in importance to the Olympic games.<sup>77</sup> Kistemaker says the local games were held in the spring of A.D. 51.<sup>78</sup>

How was the ancient Greek foot race a picture of the Christian life?

The *tertium comparationis* is not the entire contest so that the Christian race would have all the corresponding counterparts... The *tertium* lies only in οὕτως.<sup>79</sup>

This primary point of the metaphors is the imperative of v. 24b, which controls the entire paragraph. Paul is urging the Corinthians to “run” the Christian life in such a way, in this case by *exercising proper self-control* (the emphasis in vv. 25-27), as to obtain the eschatological reward. In context the area where they lack “self-control” is that of insisting on the right to idolatrous eating in the pagan temples. Exhortation, therefore, is Paul's primary purpose; but the passage also serves as a clear *warning* if they fail to “run” properly. As a warning it anticipates 10:1-22.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Lenski, p. 381.

<sup>72</sup> Arch. Robertson, p. 193.

<sup>73</sup> The NIV has translated ἐν σταδίῳ as “in a race”; it would also mean “at the stadium” (the ἀναρτηροσ σταδίῳ is similar to our “at home”; cf. ἐν μακέλλῳ in 10:25). The στάδιον was first of all a measure of distance (about 185 meters); it was naturally transferred to the arena itself, which measured the length of a στάδιον, the basic distance in the races, Fee, p. 435.

<sup>74</sup> This οὕτως points to the ἵνα -clause, making the clause epexegetic: “So run that you may obtain.” At the same time, of course, it refers back to the preceding image, Fee, p. 436.

<sup>75</sup> The change from λαμβάνει to καταλάβητε marks the difference between mere receiving and securing as one's own possession, and this play on words cannot be reproduced in English, Arch. Robertson, p. 194.

<sup>76</sup> Fee, p. 433.

<sup>77</sup> Concordia Self-Study Bible, p. 1758.

<sup>78</sup> Kistemaker, p. 312.

<sup>79</sup> Lenski, p. 383.

<sup>80</sup> Fee, p. 433.

“So run that you may win.” For Paul personally, the only thing that counts is the spread of the gospel. “For this cause he exerts himself with all his intellectual, spiritual, and physical power.”<sup>81</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 9:25**

*πάς δὲ ὁ ἀγωνιζόμενος πάντα ἐγκρατεύεται, ἐκεῖνοι μὲν<sup>82</sup> οὖν ἵνα φθαρτὸν στέφανον λάβωσιν, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἀφθαρτον.*

NIV 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.

**And everyone who is engaged in an athletic contest exercises self-control (over) everything, those therefore on the one hand that they may receive a perishable wreath, on the other hand we an imperishable.**

Paul now displays his concern for the Corinthians by a further elaboration of the imagery. He makes two points (1) the necessity of “self-control” in order to win the prize; and (2) the nature of the prize. The concerns, of course, are interrelated. Paul is genuinely concerned that they achieve the goal (cf. 6:9-11); what might cause their “disqualification” in this case is their insistence on the right to eat the cultic meals in the pagan temples. Therefore, “everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training...”<sup>83</sup>

Every athlete maintains strict self-control so he can receive the winner’s wreath:

As it did in v. 24, the present tense [ἐγκρατεύεται] states what takes place in all such cases...While they are in training these athletes exercise complete self-control with reference to food, sleep, hours for practice, etc., and avoid everything that may hurt them and devote themselves to everything that may help them in their contests.<sup>84</sup>

This wreath was probably already withered by the time it was placed on the winner’s head:

The perishable crown consisted of wild olive, ivy or parsley (Fausset); or of laurel, pine or parsley, which was said to originate from the laurel wreath that was assumed by Apollo on conquering the Python (Smith).<sup>85</sup>

Paul then uses an argument from the lesser to the greater : “...that they may receive a perishable wreath, on the other hand we an imperishable.” This final clause [“we an imperishable”] is extremely terse. Paul’s compelling the reader to use the context to fill in the details.<sup>86</sup> “The figure is intended to impress upon them that the goal, being eternal in nature, is of such value that it should affect the way they live in the present.”<sup>87</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Kistemaker, p. 313.

<sup>82</sup> The two crowns are contrasted with each other by με;ν and δε, the ου\n only continues and means “now.” Lenski, p. 383.

Robertson states, “The ου\n is independent of the με;ν, which anticipates the following δε;...; “they verily,” or “they of course, in order to receive a perishable crown.” Arch. Robertson, p. 195.

<sup>83</sup> Fee, p. 436.

<sup>84</sup> Lenski, p. 383.

<sup>85</sup> Lenski, p. 383f.

<sup>86</sup> Kistemaker, p. 313.

<sup>87</sup> Fee, p. 437.

## **1 Corinthians 9:26**

ἐγὼ τοίνυν<sup>88</sup> οὕτως τρέχω ὡς οὐκ ἀδήλως, οὕτως πυκτεύω ὡς οὐκ<sup>89</sup> ἀέρα δέρων·

NIV Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.

**Hence I, I so run as not uncertainly, so I fight with fists, as not beating air;**

In verse 24 Paul talks about “you.” In verse 25 he changes to “we” and so includes himself. Now he uses “I” and calls attention only to himself.<sup>90</sup> As far as Paul is concerned, he runs with complete certainty and he fights like one who delivers the knock-out punch.

Paul begins with two negative statements which are followed in v. 27 by two corresponding positive statements. Note the two litotes in “not uncertainly” for “with complete certainty,” “not flaying the air” for “striking home” or delivering a knockout.<sup>91</sup>

The two metaphors [running and boxing] are so parallel they no doubt are intended to make the same point.<sup>92</sup> Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians to emulate him as they see him running and fighting for the prize.

In connection with the phrase, “*so I fight with fists, as not beating air,*” Fee states that no matter how you translate and interpret the phrase “*as not beating air,*” the point of verse 25 is still the same: “*We do it to get a crown that will last forever.*” (NIV)

Is this a picture of a boxer who fails to land telling blows while in the ring, or of the exercise of shadow-boxing prior to the fight? The one speaks to the effectiveness of his effort, the other its purposefulness. Purposefulness seems to be more in keeping with the parallel in the first sentence. But the former picture could also be interpreted in that sense; that is, to get in the ring with an opponent and only beat air is as useless--and absurd--as the runner who has no eye for the finish line. This seems to make more sense, since shadow-boxing could be seen as a purposeful activity (i.e., part of the training for the fight). In either case, Paul’s point is that of v. 25.<sup>93</sup>

## **1 Corinthians 9:27**

ἀλλὰ ὑπωπιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα καὶ δουλαγωγῶ,<sup>94</sup> μή πως ἄλλοις κηρύξας αὐτὸς ἀδόκιμος<sup>95</sup> γένωμαι.

NIV No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>88</sup> In the New Testament we find *τοίνυν* only in compounds; it is usually restrictive: “I for my part now” (not: “therefore,” our versions). Lenski, p. 384. On the other hand, we have Fee who says this is “an inferential ‘therefore’ and an emphatic ‘I.’” Fee, p. 437.

<sup>89</sup> *ouj* with a participle makes the negative more decisive, R. 1137. Quoted by Lenski, p. 384.

<sup>90</sup> Kistemaker, p. 314.

<sup>91</sup> Lenski, p. 384.

<sup>92</sup> Fee, p. 437.

<sup>93</sup> Fee, p. 437.

<sup>94</sup> “Lead my body around as a slave,” Lenski, p. 385.

<sup>95</sup> *ἀδόκιμος* -This term implies that a test is made, and that whatever stands the test is rejected as *ἀδόκιμο* and is thrown out, cast away....frequently used with reference to ancient coins which were always weighed and otherwise carefully tested; the genuine and the full-weight coins were accepted as “proven,” the others were rejected as “disproven”... Lenski, p. 388.

**But I strike my body under the eye and I bring it into subjection, lest somehow having preached to others, I myself become disqualified.**

Paul strikes his body under the eye—he lands the knock-out punch and enslaves his sinful flesh.

We now learn who Paul’s opponent is, namely his own body with its desires and its weak inclinations which are so ready to militate against his high calling. Paul says: “I hit it under the eye,” *ὕπωπιάζω* (*ὕπό* =under, and *w[f* =eye)...To hit a powerful blow under the eye is to knock the body out, which is precisely what Paul means. He does not maul his body, bruise it here and there or even all over, but lays it flat with the right blow in the right place.<sup>97</sup>

He does this so he personally will not fail to stand the test, after having proclaimed the gospel to others.

The apostle still keeps to the same figure, comparing his preaching, in which he summoned and exhorted men to the Christian life, to the office of the herald who made known the laws of the games and called the champions to the combat.<sup>98</sup>

What a calamity when a professing Christian finds himself “rejected in the end.” How much worse when one of the Lord’s own heralds has this experience! Paul regards his work and even the way in which he does his work with extreme seriousness. The fact that he is an apostle is not yet proof to him that he will be saved. He knows the test that he must face.<sup>99</sup>

In concluding our study of this section from 1 Corinthians 9, let’s take to heart Fee’s words:

We have been called to a higher life of service that includes self-control and the willingness to endure hardship as concomitants. Perhaps too many contemporary Christians have lost sight of their eschatological goal and are running aimlessly, if they are in the “contest” at all.<sup>100</sup>

### Observations and Conclusions

After considering both of these wonderful sections of Scripture (1 Cor. 2:1-5 and 1 Cor. 9:19-27) and then trying to place them together under the general theme of spiritual growth, I asked myself the question: “*How can we become all things to all men while we know nothing except Christ crucified?*” But in asking such a question I found myself focusing on the “*all things to all men*” part of the equation, rather than on “*Christ crucified.*” I was asking the wrong question. But I suppose that’s only natural for a sinful human being to do—to focus on what I do, rather than on what Christ has done for me.

Upon further consideration I realized that our goal is not to be all things to all men, but to preach Christ. We become all things to all men *so we can share him with everyone*. The question then is: how do we do that the way Paul did? To the Jews he became like a Jew to win the Jews. To the Gentiles he became like a Gentile. To the weak he became weak to win the weak.

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<sup>96</sup> Kistemaker (p.314f.) offers the NIV here as an example of how translators have expanded the sentence or changed the wording, since it does not seem to them to be a conclusive statement. But Fee disagrees (p. 440) with Kistemaker on this. He writes the NIV has correctly added the phrase “for the prize.”

<sup>97</sup> Lenski, p. 385.

<sup>98</sup> Meyer, p. 214.

<sup>99</sup> Lenski, p. 388.

<sup>100</sup> Fee, p. 441.



How do you and I follow the apostle's example? How do we share the message of Christ crucified, along with the rest of his Word, to those who have grown up in traditional Christian localities, whose ears are used to hearing about Christ and God and church, but whose hearts have grown calloused? How do we bring the gospel to the relatively new ethnic communities of our country? How do we proclaim the great message of Scripture to people in different parts of our nation (and around the world) who have different social norms and customs than we do?

These are all legitimate questions, questions I have tried to answer even in my own ministry. I'm sure you have, too. During my seminary training in my former church body I served as a vicar in two missions in the state of New Mexico. How do you share God's Word with others when you are the minority in the culture in which you are living? How do you gain a hearing for God's Word when the majority of people speak a primary language (Spanish) you don't know the first thing about? How do you tell others about Jesus when you knock on their doors canvassing, and because you are wearing a white shirt and tie, they think you're either a Mormon or an INS agent?

These are legitimate questions. I also asked them when I spent thirteen years in the South, ten of which were in the southern Appalachians, where people were (and still are) suspicious of Yankees, and where our worship service (from the 1941 The Lutheran Hymnal) was considered Catholic and extremely boring. ("Why do you Lutherans wear those silly robes anyway? Do ya'll think you're priests or something?") It was not until I returned to Minnesota that I could work with people in my own comfort zone. But even in places like Minnesota, Iowa and Missouri, there are more and more people around us from different nationalities. How many more Chavez's and Hernandez's, how many more Muhammad's and Ali's, how many more Chang's, Vang's, Lee's and Kim's are living next door to us compared to ten years ago, or even five? We are still an immigrant nation. Our cultures and our ethnicities are often like brick walls separating us from each other.

As we proclaim Christ crucified to a world lost in its sin and unbelief, we do so by becoming "*all things to all men so that by all possible means*" we "*might save some,*" 1 Cor. 9:22. That means *we preach and teach all the doctrines of God's Word, but the gospel is always the focus and the center of our proclamation.* That means in matters neither commanded nor forbidden by God in his Word (adiaphora), *we are free to do whatever serves our proclamation best.*

Where the problem comes in however, is when we are tempted to downplay or dummy-down or even ignore certain teachings of God's Word because somehow they are viewed as hindrances to the gospel. (How often in moments of sinful weakness, haven't we thought that about the doctrines of fellowship and the roles of men and women, for example?) To insist on purity of doctrine is sometimes considered by some (hopefully not us) as not being all things to all people. Those who feel this way, whether they want to admit it or not, are taking the converting and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit out of the Word, and placing it instead on human reason, man-made methods and worldly techniques. This is nothing short of Reformed theology.

To be mission-and-evangelism-minded and to be confessional-Lutheran are not two mutually exclusive terms. To be all things to all men without focusing on the message of Christ and his Word doesn't do anyone any real eternal good. Then we will all be disqualified. Maintaining pure doctrine without focusing on Christ and without any effort to share it with others is just as sinful. An attitude like that only turns one into a Pharisee.

I would like to share with you these words from Werner Franzmann, which were presented fifty years ago at the 1955 Wisconsin Synod convention. For those of you who are familiar with your church history, this was a watershed convention in our relations with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. But in the midst of all the doctrinal struggle of that decade, note the evangelistic zeal and concern for outreach of one of our spiritual fathers. This was a mission zeal and concern that was linked hand in hand with zeal and concern for maintaining

doctrinal unity and for maintaining our confessional integrity. These words represent a wonderful summary of what it means to “*become all things to all men*”:

Therefore let us state more concretely what is involved in “being made all things to all men.” It requires that we study the particular sinner with whom we would share our Christ; that we become well acquainted with his way of thinking, his viewpoints, his mental quirks, his emotional state; that we listen with infinite patience to his troubles, fears, and doubts; that we know his background and his level of intelligence. But this is no cold, clinical study. The method of our Lord and of Paul means more: that we put ourselves in his place, get on his level, learn to talk his language, feel with him, identify ourselves with him. To be sure, this is no art easily come by. What then? Shall we lean on psychology or sociology as our main props? Shall we make ourselves over into extroverts, good mixers, or engaging personalities? It is neither that simple nor that complicated.

Paul points the way. His example calls out to us: Let the love of Christ constrain you. Constantly the Spirit of Christ is at work to make a deeper impress on our hearts with the love that acted and endured and that bled and died for us. Let us not resist His working, but yield to it. As the love of Christ for us thus possesses us, a stronger love for souls redeemed by Him takes possession of us. This love takes us out of ourselves, makes us, if you will understand it correctly, spiritual extroverts. It endows us with “that mind which was also in Christ Jesus,” enabling us to follow the injunction: “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:4). We learn to deny self. We learn to forget and forego personal comfort and convenience, pleasure and profit. We overcome pet likes and dislikes that keep us from making close contact with the soul to be won. We break through habitual patterns of thought and conquer ingrained aversion and reluctance.

Yes, we fight more successfully to keep our body under, as did Paul; to deal roughly with its unwillingness to be “put out” for anyone, its tendency to fritter away time and opportunity in self-pity, to substitute “socializing” for evangelizing, to develop an inordinate craving for leisure and recreation, to find excuses in the hot—or the cold—weather. [Footnote- At this point the essayist added an extemporaneous remark. He pointed out that Paul’s words have an application to church attendance. In a sermon on “Thy Kingdom Come” Dr. Wm. Dallmann urges that the churchgoer regard every service he attends as a “mission institute.” He is there to be fortified in his own faith, yes. But it is also an opportunity to equip himself better for the task of witness-bearing. The preacher will, of course, bear this in mind and shape his sermons accordingly.]

All that we have said has a particular force for the public witness-bearer, the minister and the missionary. He has the full-time task of bringing the Gospel to people. How important it is that he avoids thinking of “people” as a mass, a rather abstract whole. If he does so think of them, his ministry may readily assume the character of one pursuing a professional career. Then, too, “a love, or passion, for souls” can become a cliché, a mere slogan.

Look at Paul. He had an intense love for souls, but from his words it is evident that this love was directed to the individual. Therefore let the ambassador of Christ consciously develop the high and difficult art of being all things to all men—one by one. Let him, at the same time, not think of this as some unattainable ideal. Paul commended his course to the Corinthians for the very purpose of stimulating and inciting them to exercise the same self-denying love.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Franzmann, p. 4f.

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