LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

All things to all men

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Hi, and welcome back to our study through 1 Corinthians. This is part two of our study through chapter nine, and we're going to do something a little bit different in that we're only going to be taking a few verses in this study. We're going to be looking at verses 19 through 23. So really just four verses, but there's some important things that we need to talk about in these verses because they've been misunderstood, they've been misapplied, and we want to bring some clarity and understanding. Now let me explain.

The reason we're not going to take the last few verses of the chapter right now is because those verses really go better with chapter 10. Verses 24 through the end of the chapter, which is 27, are connected with chapter 10 in such a way that really this is kind of a poor place where they put the chapter division. As you'll remember, when Paul wrote this letter, there were no chapters, there were no verses. It was just a letter. And so this wasn't done until hundreds and hundreds of years later, and this is one of the examples where they didn't really connect the chapters very well in the sense of keeping things thematically together.

So that's why we're just going to be taking verses 19 through 23 here today, and let's go ahead and read those verses, and then we'll pray and get into it. It goes like this, reading from the ESV. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law.

To those outside the law I became as one outside the law, not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I might share with them in its blessings. All right, those are the verses we're going to cover this time.

Let's pray. Father, as we get into this section of Paul's letter, we pray for understanding, we pray for insight, we pray for application. We ask you to guide and direct our hearts and to open us to the things that you want to say. And we ask it in the name of Jesus our Savior, amen, amen. Well I think these verses are all fairly understandable from the standpoint of what Paul is really trying to say.

He's telling people, the Corinthians specifically, that when he goes to share the gospel with different groups, different people, sometimes even different levels of spiritual maturity, he adapts himself to those people in order that he might win them for Christ, that he might bring the gospel to them, and that they might understand what the gospel is all about. And so he says, although I am free, I willingly make myself a servant by surrendering my rights—remember that's been the theme of the last few studies—I will surrender my rights in order that I might be able to reach these people with the gospel. And then he begins by saying, when I'm talking to Jews, I become as they are. Now this one would have been really easy for Paul, because obviously he was a Jew, he was a man who had been a Pharisee, he knew what it was to be a lawkeeper and just to think like a Jew, because the thinking was very different, very unique, and it was a very different sort of an approach to living life, and Paul knew that. And so when he's talking to Jews, he's going to relate to them from the standpoint of their thinking, their worldview, their approach to the world, and so forth.

He says, to those under the law, and obviously that's going to probably mean a very devout sort of a Jew, someone who—and then this could even be someone who is not a Jew, but is just simply living under the law of the Jews, that would mean a Gentile convert, perhaps, to Judaism. He says, to those under the law, I became as one under the law. But then he says, parenthetically, and this is an important statement, though not being myself under the law. So he says, I'm going to appeal to someone, I'm going to talk to someone, understanding what it is to be under the law. I'm going to talk to them in a way that they're going to understand.

I'm going to relate to them with their understanding of God from the standpoint of the law, even though I am no longer under the law. Now we need to explain what he means by that, because this is something people misunderstand. In fact, I get emails and notes all the time. When I make a statement, like Paul does, and I say, we as Christians are not under the law, then I inevitably get notes from people and they say, so you're saying that we can just kill, we can murder, even though the law says you shall not murder? Is that what you're saying?

And we can just steal and lie and commit adultery and do all those things just because you're not under the law? Do you understand the way this is being taken by these folks? When we say we're not under the

law, what we're saying is we are not looking to the law as a means of justification and of righteous standing before God. Because Paul tells us very clearly in the book of Romans, no man will be considered righteous by keeping the law. The law doesn't make you righteous, okay?

So when we say I am not under the law, we're saying I'm not attempting to keep the rigors and commands of the law in order to be deemed righteous by God. I am looking somewhere else for my righteous standing. And of course for us as believers, we're looking to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as our means of righteousness, imputed to us by faith. That's what we mean when we say we're not under the law. That's what Paul meant when he said, I'm not under the law as a means of righteousness.

So he says that parenthetically as a qualification, but that's an important qualification to understand when he says, to those under the law, I become like one under the law. He's not saying that when I'm talking to people who are under the law, I'm going to talk like, yeah, the law is my righteousness. It's not what he's saying. He's saying I'm going to relate to them from their understanding, but he's still going to preach the gospel. And guys, the gospel is not righteousness by keeping the law.

That isn't good news. That's bad news. The gospel, which of course means good news, is that we are righteous by faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. And Paul is never going to back away from what the gospel is, even though he's talking to someone who is under the law. So talking to somebody as if I am under the law, because they are, does not mean I'm going to compromise the gospel.

It means I'm just going to relate to them. I'm going to talk to them using words that they can understand and relate to, but I'm going to share the new covenant gospel message, all right? So he says, this is what I do to win those under the law. And then he says in verse 21, to those outside the law. So these, you know, you might say, well, who's outside the law?

Well, you know, technically no one is outside the law. because even sins of ignorance are still sins. What Paul is referring to here is people who have not received the law. So he says to those outside the law or to those who have not yet received the law in any sort of understandable way, I become as one outside the law, meaning I'm gonna talk to them and relate to them in a way that they can understand, all right? I'm not going to dismiss the law.

I'm not gonna tell them that the law doesn't matter. I'm gonna talk to them from their perspective, from their thought process, because they've not been brought up under the law, so I'm not gonna bring that into it because all the law is gonna do is gonna condemn them. So I'm just gonna relate to them where they are,

where their understanding is, and so forth. And then he says again, it's shown here parenthetically in the ESV, not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ that I might win those outside the law. So he says if I'm talking to somebody who doesn't know or understand the law, I'm gonna relate to them as one who doesn't bring the law into the conversation, because that's not gonna work with them.

So I'm not—I'm gonna be to them like someone who is like they are, outside of the law. But this is what he says parenthetically. Although, you know, I'm not free from the law of Christ. Notice he made that change. He didn't say, although I am under the law of God.

That would be a misstatement. That would be going back under his Jewish roots. He says what I am under now is the law of Christ. What is the law of Christ? How do we understand that?

And is it a different set of rules than the law of God that was given under the Mosaic Covenant? No, no, it's not really different. It just has a different way of relating to us. In Jeremiah chapter 31, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah about a new covenant that he would be making with the people of God. And he said, this is the covenant that I will make with them after that time.

I will take my law and write it on their hearts. Okay? Now, he's talking about the moral law here because, you know, when we talk about the law of God from the Old Testament, there are two parts to the law. There's the ceremonial law where you have things like Sabbath-keeping, food laws, so on and so forth. And then there is the moral aspect of the law.

Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not lie. Okay? That which is the moral law of God has been written on our hearts through the indwelling Holy Spirit that is given to every believer who comes to faith in Jesus Christ.

And so, instead of being under the Old Testament Mosaic law, that law has now been placed within our hearts. It is personal. It's no longer on tablets of stone. It is now written on the heart. And that is the law that we follow.

It is given to us through the Spirit, through conviction, through wisdom, through understanding and clarity. These are the things that the Holy Spirit is communicating to us through His indwelling presence in our lives. So that's what Paul means when he says, you know, I'm still under the law of Christ, which is that understanding of the moral code that is given to all of us as believers through the Spirit. Verse 22 is interesting. He says, to the weak I became weak that I might win the weak.

I've become all things to all people. We've already heard this term weak in our previous studies, and it refers to people whose faith is weak, and so they live a life of weakness. These are the kind of people who refused to eat meat sacrificed to idols because they thought it would defile them. Now Paul says, listen, we know that that's not the case, but he's telling us here that when I'm around these people, I'm gonna live like they live. I'm gonna relate to them as how they relate to the world and God, and I'm not going to eat meat in front of them.

I'm gonna be like them. I'm gonna live like them, almost like my own faith is weak, so that I might bring them to a greater understanding of the Word of God and growth and maturity, okay? He says, I do this that I might win the weak. I've become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. And then the final verse of this section we're looking at today really sums up the chapter, or not just the chapter, the section we're looking at here in this study.

He says, I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them the people I'm trying to reach in its blessings, right? That's why I do all this, for the sake of the gospel. What Paul is talking about here is really an inconvenient way to live, because you know, once we grow and mature in our faith in Jesus, there's great freedom to live our lives, but Paul is saying, I willingly give up those freedoms so that I might reach people with the gospel of Jesus. And again, this is not a tremendously convenient way to live, because I'm always adapting myself to the people I'm talking to, you know? And I'm having to give up my rights and my privileges for the sake of reaching these people, but Paul believed that reaching them was more important than enjoying his personal privileges, and that's the bottom line.

So you can kind of see thematically what Paul is saying in this section of 1 Corinthians, and what he's trying to communicate to them, and I believe to us as well. What are you willing to do to reach people for Jesus? Now the thing we have to clarify in our understanding about being all things to all people, is that Paul is never going to compromise morality to reach people. What I mean by that is, you know, if someone were to say to me, well, you know, I try to, my ministry is to reach people in the bars, and the people in the bars are drinking, so I'm gonna go in the bar and I'm gonna drink, and if I have to get drunk, well, so be it, because that's what they're doing, and I'm gonna be all things to all people. That's not what Paul is saying, and that would be a compromise of what he's communicating, and that would actually ruin the witness that he's trying to convey about the power of the gospel to transform our lives.

Paul is not saying to the sinner, I become a sinner, okay? He's not saying, if there are a bunch of people I'm trying to reach, and they are engaging in this sin or that sin, well, I'm just gonna engage in it right along with them, so that I might reach them with the gospel. No, no, that is not what he is saying. Paul

would not compromise, and that's what he means in this section when he says, when I'm talking to somebody who is outside of the law, I'm gonna relate to them as someone outside of the law, although I'm not outside of the law of Christ, and I never will be. That's what he's saying here.

I still have a moral law that I abide by, and it is the law communicated to me through the Holy Spirit in my heart, and I know what's right and wrong, and I'm not gonna violate what's right and wrong, but I'm just gonna relate to these people, alright? So this is a proper understanding of these verses. The gospel should never be compromised, and our moral code should never be compromised while we seek to reach people, but as we seek to reach people, we seek to relate to them on their level, their understanding, their worldview, and we do it, as Paul says, all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. A little bit shorter study here this time, but some good things to think about, and I trust that you will be thinking about what this passage is saying and how you can apply it as you share the gospel with other people. Let's pray, shall we?

Father, thank you. Thank you for this time. Thank you for the wisdom that the Apostle Paul gives in this section of 1 Corinthians. Thank you, Lord, for the reminders that there is a higher level of living and that higher level is sacrificing for others that they might come to know Christ as their savior. Help us, Lord, as we go through our weeks to think about this and to think about how we can apply it and share the love of Jesus with others.

Be with us, we pray. Strengthen our hearts day by day and guide and direct us through your word. We ask it in the name of Jesus, our savior, amen.