

1 Cor. 9:19-23 “All Things to All Men”

For the Children: It can be very annoying when someone tells you they agree with you, and then you find out they said exactly the opposite to someone else. Some people like to agree with everyone – they don't like arguments. God's children are not to be like that: we should be agreeing with the *Lord* all the time. We should also be honest. But that doesn't mean we have to insist on our own way all the time. Sometimes it will be better to help someone by fitting in with their way of doing things. At other times, we will have to disagree. Whatever we do, it should involve obeying the Lord first, and doing what will best help others second. **Questions:** Mention some situations where the apostle Paul did not push his own practice on others; mention some situations where the apostle refused to do what others wanted; what were the apostle's 3 main reasons for trying to be “all things to all men”?

Introduction:

First Point: A Free Slave

- 1) Most Free: When the apostle says he is free from all men, he means he is not under their control, such that his conscience is under compulsion from their opinions and customs. He is not a “bought man,” controlled by their financing and power.
- 2) Slave to All: Being in another sense a “slave to all” in no way contradicts the freedom we have in Christ. For this is a case where the “slave” *volunteers* his service. The apostle chooses to refrain from exercising some freedoms, in order to serve their spiritual needs and avoid unnecessary stumbling blocks.
- 3) A Few Examples: Paul supplies some examples of this voluntary service. When he was with Jews, he took care to avoid making circumcision an issue (Acts 16:1-3). See also Acts 18:18, 21:24. He avoided eating foods that the Jews saw as unclean. To the Jews he became “as a Jew” under the OT ceremonial law – not truly under it, but fitting in with their custom as if he were. With the Gentiles he did the opposite, not worrying about circumcision or food-laws. With the “weak” he became as if he were weak: avoiding things like wine or meat offered to idols, about which they had scruples.
- 4) A Fine Balance: It is hard to take this approach without appearing to compromise according to the company; or encouraging people to remain enslaved to legalism. To maintain the balance, it is necessary to teach about both our freedom in Christ and our obligation to abiding principles. Even while refraining from exercising certain freedoms, the apostle kept on teaching the truth about these matters. He only allowed himself to be “all things to all men” in indifferent matters. Where the Gospel was undermined by legalism, he took a stand e.g. refusing to circumcise Titus (Gal. 2:3, 5:2). See also Col. 2:16. He kept before him the fact that alongside his freedom in Christ, he was also under Christ's law (v. 21).

Second Point: For the Sake of the Gospel

- 1) In Order to Win More: The apostle did not take this approach in order to avoid conflict, to appear congenial, to feel superior, or for other unworthy motives. He did so for the sake of the Gospel – in order to win more people to it, and build up more who already accepted it. This reason is given in every verse of the text, 5 times in all. He adds that he acts this way so that he may “by all means save some” (v. 22).
- 2) To Uphold the Law of Love: The law of Christ under which Paul operates includes the “law of love” as its summary. By refraining from exercising certain freedom at times, Paul demonstrates love of God and neighbour. To insist on our own way and place unnecessary stumbling-blocks in the way of others is not loving.
- 3) A Fellow-Partaker of the Gospel: When more people are won to the Gospel, or built up in it, by Paul taking this approach, he becomes a sharer in the ever-expanding progress of the Gospel. The apostle's motives are all Gospel-centred.

Conclusion:

