



Silverdale Baptist

VICTORY IN CHAOS ~ WILLING TO BECOME ALL THINGS ~ 1 CORINTHIANS 9:16-22 ~ 03/11-12/2023

Main Idea

The world is rapidly changing, but the gospel never changes.

Getting Started

What has changed since you graduated from High School?

What hasn't changed?

A lot has changed since we were teenagers. For some of us, television was black and white, with four channels, and went off at midnight. Now, most of us are watching shows and movies on an app. For some of us, computers did not exist, and we thought slide rules were terrific. Most of us now use a brilliant miniature supercomputer that doubles as a smartphone.

But a lot hasn't changed. People are still hurting, insecure, and desperate to find acceptance. People outside of Jesus are still looking for love in all the wrong places. Those who have found love need to tell others where to find true love.

The gospel message never changes, but the methods of sharing the gospel change from generation to generation and culture to culture.

Let's see what Paul says about the gospel and how to share it.

Learn

1. The message of the gospel never changes.

First, let's define the gospel. Paul does this near the end of this letter.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-4.

At its essence, what exactly is the gospel?

Now that we know the gospel, what does Paul tell us about sharing the gospel with others?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 9:16-22.

According to verse 16, what is Paul's relationship to the gospel?

The gospel's message never changes, and our responsibility to share the gospel has never changed, either. But what about how we share the gospel? Has the method ever changed?

2. The methods of sharing the gospel always change.

From this passage, what is Paul's approach to reaching people with a different cultural perspective with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

From what we have read, what makes Paul a successful evangelist?

Pastor Tony gave us three ways the church has historically approached culture.

- We can retreat from the culture
- We can conform to the culture
- We can utilize the culture

In what ways have we, as believers, retreated from the culture?

What does it look like when we have conformed to our culture?

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind"

(Rom 12:2)

How can we utilize the characteristics of culture to share the good news?

3. The motive for sharing the gospel is changed lives.

From this passage, what are the compromises Paul is willing to make in order to make the gospel more accessible to those around him?

Leader: Pastor Tony references three rights Paul gave up. Those rights come from earlier in chapter 9. They are on your sermon outline, and we have included them in this guide.

The Rights that Paul Gave Up

- The Right to Eat and Drink (1 Cor. 9:4)
- The Right to be Married (1 Cor. 9:5)
- The Right of Financial Support (1 Cor. 9:12)

Discuss how giving up these rights helped Paul to reach his culture.

From verses 20-22, who did Paul try to be like? Why?

Paul sets a radical example in this chapter. He gave up his rights and preferences to be a missionary to the culture around him. Shouldn't we?

Apply

Paul was *compelled* to preach the gospel. Are we?

How and when do you brag about Jesus and tell others what He has done?

How do we apply Paul's model of becoming "all things to all people, that by all means I might save some?" What would this look like in our community?

How are you personally using the characteristics of our culture as tools to share the gospel?

Are you willing to sacrifice your preferences for the gospel?

Are you willing to sacrifice secondary issues for the sake of the gospel?

Are you willing to learn from our missionaries how to be effective in our culture?

Pray

Father, teach us to let go of our preferences, traditions, and rights to be more effective missionaries in our community. In Jesus' name, we ask, amen.

Dig Deeper

For the Gospel's sake (vv. 15–18). Paul did not want to "hinder the Gospel of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:12). In that day, the Greek cities were filled with all kinds of itinerant teachers and preachers, most of whom were out to make money. Not only had Paul refused to use the kind of oratory and arguments that these teachers used (1 Cor. 2:1–5), but he also refused to accept money from those to whom he ministered. He wanted the message of the Gospel to be free from any obstacles or hindrances in the minds of lost sinners.

For that matter, when Paul added "neither have I written these things" (1 Cor. 9:15), he was making sure that his readers did not get the idea that he was "hinting" that they should support him!

Paul could not claim any credit for preaching the Gospel, because he had been called of God to preach. “Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16) God had given him a divine stewardship (“dispensation”), and “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). God would see to it that Paul would receive his wages (*reward*—same word translated “hire” in Luke 10:7).

What was Paul’s reward? The joy of preaching the Gospel without charge! This meant that no man could accuse him of underhanded motives or methods as he shared the Good News of Jesus Christ.

It is unfortunate when the ministry of the Gospel is sometimes hindered by an overemphasis on money. The unsaved world is convinced that most preachers and missionaries are only involved in “religious rackets” to take money from innocent people. No doubt there are religious “racketeers” in the world today (1 Tim. 6:3–16), people who “use” religion to exploit others and control them. We would certainly not agree with their purposes or their practices. We must make sure that nothing we do in our own ministry gives the impression that we are of their number.

A wrong attitude toward money has hindered the Gospel from the earliest days of the church. Ananias and Sapphira loved money more than they loved the truth, and God killed them (Acts 5). Simon the magician thought he could buy the gift of the Spirit with money (Acts 8:18–24). His name is now in the dictionary. *Simony* is the practice of buying and selling religious offices and privileges.

For eighteen fruitful years, Dr. H.A. Ironside pastored the Moody Church in Chicago. I recall the first time I heard him announce an offering. He said, “We ask God’s people to give generously. If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, we do not ask you to give. We have a gift for you—eternal life through faith in Christ!” He made it clear that the offering was for believers, lest the unsaved in the congregation stumble over money and then reject the Gospel.

For the sinners’ sake (vv. 19–23). What a paradox: free from all men, yet the servant of all men! “Ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). Because he was free, Paul was able to serve others and to set aside his own rights for their sake.

It is unfortunate that the phrase “all things to all men” (1 Cor. 9:22) has been used and abused by the world and made to mean what Paul did not intend for it to mean. Paul was not a chameleon who changed his message and methods with each new situation. Nor was Paul a compromiser who adjusted his message to please his audience. He was an ambassador, not a politician!

Paul was a Jew who had a great burden for his own people (Rom. 9:1–3; 10:1). But his special calling was to minister to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:8). Whenever he went into a new city (and he always went where the Gospel had not yet been preached—Rom. 15:20), he headed straight for the synagogue, if there was one, and boldly shared the Gospel. If he was rejected by the Jews, then he turned to the Gentiles.

What separated Jews and Gentiles in that day? The Law and the covenants (Eph. 2:11–15). In his personal life, Paul so lived that he did not offend either the Jews or the Gentiles. He did not parade his liberty before the Jews, nor did he impose the Law on the Gentiles.

Was Paul behaving in an inconsistent manner? Of course not. He simply adapted his approach to different groups. When you read his sermons in the Book of Acts, you see this wise adaptation. When he preached to Jews, he started with the Old Testament patriarchs; but when he preached to Gentiles, he began with the God of Creation. Paul did not have a “stock sermon” for all occasions.

It is worth noting that our Lord followed the same approach. To the highborn Jew, Nicodemus, He talked about spiritual birth (John 3); but to the Samaritan woman, He spoke about living water (John 4). Jesus was flexible and adaptable, and Paul followed His example. Neither Jesus nor Paul had an inflexible “evangelistic formula” that was used in every situation.

It takes tact to have contact. When the people I witness to tell me about their experience of confirmation, I tell them that I too was confirmed. I express my appreciation for the pastor who taught

me and prayed for me. Then I tell them, “A year after I was confirmed, I met Jesus Christ personally and was born again.” A good witness tries to build bridges, not walls.

To immature people, Paul’s lifestyle probably looked inconsistent. In reality, he was very consistent, for his overriding purpose was to win people to Jesus Christ. Consistency can become a very legalistic thing, and a man can become so bound by man-made rules and standards that he has no freedom to minister. He is like young David trying to battle in Saul’s armor.

Paul had the right to eat whatever pleased him, but he gave up that right so that he might win the Jews. Paul revered the Law (see Rom. 7:12), but set that aside so that he might reach the lost Gentiles. He even identified himself with the legalistic weak Christians so that he might help them to grow. It was not compromise, but rather total abandonment to the higher law of love. Paul followed the example of the Saviour and humbled himself to become the servant of all.

For his own sake (vv. 24–27). Paul was fond of athletic images and used them often in his letters. The Corinthians would have been familiar with the Greek Olympic Games as well as their own local Isthmian Games. Knowing this, Paul used a metaphor very close to their experience.

An athlete must be disciplined if he is to win the prize. Discipline means giving up the good and the better for the best. The athlete must watch his diet as well as his hours. He must smile and say “No, thank you” when people offer him fattening desserts or invite him to late-night parties. There is nothing wrong with food or fun, but if they interfere with your highest goals, then they are hindrances and not helps.

The Christian does not run the race in order to get to heaven. He is in the race because he has been saved through faith in Jesus Christ. Only Greek citizens were allowed to participate in the games, and they had to obey the rules both in their training and in their performing. Any contestant found breaking the training rules was automatically disqualified.

In order to give up his rights and have the joy of winning lost souls, Paul had to discipline himself. That is the emphasis of this entire chapter: Authority (rights) must be balanced by discipline. If we want to serve the Lord and win His reward and approval, we must pay the price.

The word *castaway* (1 Cor. 9:27) is a technical word familiar to those who knew the Greek games. It means “disapproved, disqualified.” At the Greek games, there was a herald who announced the rules of the contest, the names of the contestants, and the names and cities of the winners. He would also announce the names of any contestants who were disqualified.

Paul saw himself as both a “herald” and a “runner.” He was concerned lest he get so busy trying to help others in the race that he ignore himself and find himself disqualified. Again, it was not a matter of losing personal salvation. (The disqualified Greek athlete did not lose his citizenship, only his opportunity to win a prize.) The whole emphasis is on *rewards*, and Paul did not want to lose his reward.

Only one runner could win the olive-wreath crown in the Greek games, but *every* believer can win an incorruptible crown when he stands before the Judgment Seat of Christ. This crown is given to those who discipline themselves for the sake of serving Christ and winning lost souls. They keep their bodies under control and keep their eyes on the goal.

In recent years, evangelical Christians have rediscovered the importance of personal discipline and the relationship between a disciplined body and a Spirit-filled life. We must, of course, avoid extremes. On the one hand, religious asceticism is unhealthy and of no value spiritually (Col. 2:18–23). But on the other hand, there is something to be said for disciplined eating, exercising, and resting, and a Spirit-directed balanced life. We smugly congratulate ourselves that we do not smoke or use alcohol, but what about our overeating and overweight? And many Christians cannot discipline their time so as to have a consistent devotional life or Bible-study program.

Paul had one great goal in life: to glorify the Lord by winning the lost and building up the saints. To reach this goal, he was willing to pay any price. *He was willing even to give up his personal rights!* He sacrificed immediate gains for eternal rewards, immediate pleasures for eternal joys.¹

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [*The Bible Exposition Commentary*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 600–602.