

"That I Might by All Means Save Some"

Call to Worship: Isaiah 54:1-3

Hymn #387- *I Love to Tell the Story*

1st Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8

Hymn #383- *From Greenland's Icy Mountains*

2nd Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9

Hymn #370- *We Have Heard the Joyful Sound*

Introduction:

"I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." These are some of the Apostle Paul's striking, conclusive words, given in verse 22 of our text. Doesn't sound too Calvinistic, does it? Let me ask you this question. Were I to stroll up to you on some occasion, overcome with a sense of passion, speaking the words, "Hey, you know, I do everything I can within the bounds of God's moral will to save lost souls...I seek to use all godly means possible so that I might save some," what would your immediate response be? Perhaps, some of you would immediately jar out, "Heretic! You can't save anyone...only God can save...you may as well be a Muslim or a Catholic, or at best, an Arminian." Maybe others among you would be more gracious in your confrontation and rebuke, while still ensuring that some corrective remarks are brought forth. And perhaps others would simply blow it off as a passionate error on my part. But probably many would not feel too comfortable hearing me say such a thing as that, and even more would be terrified to make such a statement on their own. And yet, the Apostle Paul himself states these words boldly to the Corinthians, with the utmost sincerity and passion.

What are we to make of this statement, proclaimed by the Apostle Paul? Is there any significance to these words at all, or should we simply blow right past them, and get back into the thick meat of better theology? Well, let me answer these two questions in very general and perhaps complicated terms for a moment, before breaking this statement down throughout the remainder of the sermon, hopefully bringing us to the place of clarity, calling for an active response on our part. First, the Apostle's words here bring us into a theology of "means" and "passion," exposing the nature of the Apostle's heart, while utterly refuting any hyper-calvinistic notion, presented by those who carry their Calvinistic beliefs into a practical realm in which God

had never intended us to carry them. And secondly, there is great significance to this statement, especially for those who are committed to the Calvinistic teachings of the Reformation. This statement carries the doctrines of grace and election and the sovereignty of God together with a sincere evangelistic zeal; it leads them to embrace and to move forward together, bringing about the most effective Christianity in existence. It removes the aisle that separates the hard core "emotionalists" from the hardcore "reserved doctrinists," forming a deadly weapon in the hand of our God. It brings wisdom and emotion down the aisle to be married together, so that a glorious and powerful marriage is formed in the heart of the believer. It softens the dull, and makes them fervent and passionate, and it directs and guides the spontaneous, bringing the target of God's glory right into focus, making it accessible by imperfect men.

Now, if you are confused by some of my terms, have no fear, the very purpose of this message is to open all of this up, so that we might prayerfully apply all that we find here.

I. Paul was a Calvinist

When we think of Calvinism, right or wrong, our minds immediately move to what are known as the "Five Points of Calvinism." Now, in actuality, John Calvin's teachings and his system of theology were far broader than the "Five Points of Calvinism." You would better say that the "Five Points of Calvinism" are an extraction of five specific complimentary teachings, which have been taken out of Calvin's overall theology, as a means of refuting the teachings of Jacob Arminius, the classic representative of the "Five Points of Arminianism." In fact, neither John Calvin nor Jacob Arminius were alive when the whole "Five Points" issue came to the forefront. John Calvin died in 1564, only four years after Jacob Arminius was born in 1560. Clearly, there was no direct dialog between them. And Jacob Arminius died in 1609, almost ten years before the *Synod of Dort* met, to debate this issue in 1618-1619. It was the disciples/followers of Mr. Arminius who provoked this meeting (especially by the publication of the *Remonstrance of 1610*), as they were spreading the teachings of Jacob Arminius, which contradicted the *Belgic Confession* and the teachings of John Calvin and the Reformers, especially concerning the part that man plays, if any, in securing his own salvation. Hence, the five points were put together, and a national *Synod* gathered in Dordrecht to wrestle through this

matter. Needless to say, the Synod concluded that the "Five Points of Arminianism" were unbiblical and to be rejected by the church. In contrast to these points, they published their findings/conclusions in a formal document known as, *the Canons of Dort*, which have commonly come to be referred to as the *Five Points of Calvinism*.

What are these five points, which have been embraced by those of the Reformed faith, and how do they contend with the teachings of Arminianism? Here is the short form, taken from the well known acronym of TULIP:

1) Total Depravity: Sin has affected every part of man's being, such that he is biblically classified as "dead in his sin." He is totally depraved. Because of this, it is impossible for man to respond to the Gospel by his own initiative. He is naturally without the ability or even the desire to believe in Christ. Man must first be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, before he can and will respond to God's general Gospel call. Arminianism teaches that while man's human nature has been seriously affected by the fall, he is not left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. He can respond to the general call of the Gospel, in accordance with his "free will."

2) Unconditional Election: God has, in Christ, chosen, before the foundation of the world, every single individual whom He would redeem in Christ. Redeemed sinners have been elected unconditionally by grace, before time, not on the basis of any decision they would make in time. Dead sinners will never make "a decision for Christ." Arminianism teaches that God's pre-time election was based on what He foresaw would happen, as He looked down the tunnels of time to discover how each person would respond to the Gospel.

3) Limited Atonement (Particular Redemption): Christ died effectually, only for the elect, whom God had chosen before time, in Christ. Christ did not die for everyone. He died only for a specific people from every tribe, tongue and nation in the world. He secured the redemption of His people alone. Arminianism teaches that Christ died for every single individual in the world, but only those who believe, will receive the benefits of this atonement. In that sense, Christ's death guarantees nothing for anyone, unless they believe.

4) Irresistible Grace: The Holy Spirit regenerates or quickens those whom God has elected before time, and those whom Christ has died for, so that they will believe the Gospel and inherit eternal life. The Holy Spirit makes the "general call" of the Gospel "efficacious"

(effectual) for God's elect. He creates both the will and the desire, for the elect to respond to the Gospel call. Arminianism teaches that the Holy Spirit calls inwardly all who receive the general call of the Gospel (all who hear the Gospel), but the sinner can ultimately reject this call and resist the Spirit, according to his own free will.

5) Perseverance of the Saints: All whom God has elected, all for whom Christ died and all whom the Holy Spirit effectually calls, will persevere in their faith to the end. They will produce the fruit that evidences their salvation and they will never ultimately apostatize, because they are kept by the power of God unto the salvation ready to be revealed at the last day. Arminians do not all agree on this issue. Some believe that one can fall from grace and lose the salvation he once had. Others believe that once a sinner is saved, he cannot lose his salvation (has led to "easy believism" as well).

This is just a basic summary of the "Five Points of Calvinism." Much more can be said to fine tune these definitions, and many Scriptures can be brought forth to confirm them, but my main goal for this morning is not to defend the five points, but simply to ensure that we understand them, under the assumption that they are true, in accordance with our Confession of Faith, which we believe to be biblical, and which we have adopted as the Confession to which *Grace Reformed Baptist Church* in a general sense, adheres (*The 1689 LBC of Faith*).

At the least, we can see that the Apostle's statement in question (found in verse 22) could be taken to contradict these points. After all, if we cannot ultimately save ourselves, then certainly we cannot save others. Salvation is wholly a work of God, from beginning to end...to God be all glory!

We firmly believe that the Apostle Paul would have held to all of the teachings, represented by the "Five Points of Calvinism." In fact, many of the proof texts used unto the affirmation of Calvinism, come directly from the Apostle's teachings, especially, but not limited to those texts found in Ephesians 1 and Romans 9. There is no getting around it; one has to do some serious gymnastics to deny or ignore the very clear, calvinistic teachings, found in these texts, which directly deal with God's plan of salvation. So Paul was a Calvinist...or better yet,

Calvin was a "Paulist." Well, where then do we go from here, with regard to our main text? Let's survey the context, and work toward a critical conclusion.

II. The Context of 1 Corinthians 9

Paul's thinking in chapter 9 is rooted in the subject that he begins to address in chapter 8, which we have read earlier. An issue had arisen within the Corinthian church, which brought no small amount of debate, and the Apostle was called on, to resolve the matter. And the issue can be summed up like this: "Paul, we know that all of the idols that are served and worshiped by our surrounding culture are lifeless and dead. They are not true gods at all; we serve the only living and true God. Are we permitted to eat meat that has been offered to these idols, knowing what we know about the situation? Would it be wrong for us to eat the food, if we do so without any respect to the idols, which are dumb, dead and lifeless?"

Now, there were two sides to this debate. One side would say, "Look, why waste good food. We are not worshiping the dumb idols; we know the truth; it is harmless to eat the meat. There is nothing to worry about, because we know the truth, and have no desire to worship what we know to be nothing but man-made idols." And the other side would say, "No, you cannot eat meat offered to idols, because in doing so, you are partaking in a practice that is idolatry. You are inevitably worshiping the idol, when you eat the meat that has been offered to it, and so, you cannot touch the meat, and must reject it, even if you are very hungry." Needless to say, this dispute obviously became sharp, and probably caused some what of a rift within the church. And so, the Apostle had to address it, unto the preservation of the body.

And in essence, the Apostle Paul says, "Yes, your conscience may be clear when eating such meat, because indeed, we know that the idols are not real, but you also have to consider the perception that you are leaving for others, who may not know what you know. Others; particularly young Christians or those whom you want to win to Christ, may see your liberty in this regard, as an act of worship, leading them to follow suit, only serving the actual idol from their heart. God looks at the heart, and what you may be doing in the name of "Christian Liberty of conscience," others may be doing as an act of worship, seeking to serve and win the favor of the false god. And by the perception you are leaving, they will be led to believe that you

actually approve of the idolatry itself." And then, Paul sums up the matter; he gets to the very heart of it, in his wonderful statement found in verse 13, "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat again, lest I make my brother stumble." You see, Paul had a bigger picture in mind, recognizing the significant value of precious souls, which led him to make such a superlative statement, expressing his willingness to forgo his Christian liberty of eating meat, altogether, if doing so, would keep his brother from stumbling. Paul wasn't about "personal entitlements" and "personal rights"...he was about Christ! And even his Christian liberties went right out the window, when they conflicted with winning souls to Christ. And this, brethren, is the underlying theme of "sincere love for others," that pervades all that he says in chapter 9 as well.

In fact, in chapter 9, he further deals with the accusations of some, who would dare question his integrity in the Gospel. You know, there are always some who believe that a true minister of the Lord should have nothing whatsoever. And the moment a minister is enjoying something or receiving anything material throughout the course of his ministry, he is viewed as a charlatan or a hypocrite. Well, Paul was getting some flack over this...only, the *content* of the accusations was not even true in his case. Paul makes a defense on behalf of ministers, while not benefitting from that defense himself. In essence, he says, "You know, aren't we aloud to partake in some of the freedoms granted to you, and which even Peter and the other Apostles benefit from? Would it be wrong for us to take wives or to eat and drink and to maintain our living from the ministry alone, without having to work a second job?" "Would it be wrong for us to gain material support, if we spend our lives serving in the Gospel ministry?" Now, what makes this matter really interesting, is that Paul is defending a right that he wasn't even using, in the face of their accusations. Paul moves on to say, "But look, we haven't taken anything from you, all the more, because we wanted to avoid giving the gentiles even the perception that our interest in their spiritual welfare was really an interest in our own earthly sustenance." We denied our own rights for the sake of the Gospel. You accuse us of a wrong that is not wrong...God desires ministers of the Gospel to make their living through the Gospel; but even worse, we haven't even exercised this right...no, we worked with our own two hands, to feed our bellies!"

And again, brethren, we see that principle coming to the foreground, don't we? Where were the Apostle's eyes fixed? Was it not on the welfare of others, even to the expense of a right (a privilege) he could have properly enjoyed, and which the other Apostles were enjoying?

Well, brethren, this then brings us to our main text, seated in verses 19-23. Paul has already dealt with the forgoing of Christian and personal liberties for the sake of others, in our first two examples, and now he brings it further home in a third example, giving us a picture of what "Christian love" looks like. As Christians, we are free to be who we are, and to embrace the culture in which we are most comfortable, in so far, as we don't trample upon God's moral Law in the process. But there are times, when we ought even to forgo the luxuries and comforts of the culture we have embraced, for the sake of the lost in other cultures. Paul knew that while, in Christ, he was no longer bound to the Jewish ceremonial laws, that to win Jews, he would have to meet them on that ground. He would have to "be a Jew" to win the Jews. It was his only means of gaining an audience with them, so that he could bring them the Gospel in their own context. But being an Apostle to the Gentiles, he knew that there were harmless, non-idolatrous and yet unpreferred and undesirable customs, which the gentiles performed, and in which he would have to partake, if he wanted to reach the gentiles. To reach them; to gain their audience and their trust, he would have to become them, in so far as he preserved and maintained his obedience to God's moral Law. Paul was willing to "shape shift" in any way possible, that could show his listeners that he truly loved and cared for them. He could wear their clothing...though it was perhaps undesirable. He could eat their food, and practice their cultural customs; He could shun his personal enjoyments that they shunned...etc, bending his own cultural preferences and creature comforts; sacrificing his Christian and personal liberties, if by doing so, he could gain an audience for Christ! Paul loved souls! Paul loved souls! Paul loved souls! He saw the value of the *inner* man, and was willing to forsake the value of his *outer* man, in order to gain the *inner* man of others! Hence, his words in verse 22, "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some."

[A *servant* to all!]

III. The Main Message Here

And what is the main message here, brethren? What is the consistent message, driven home in chapters 8 and 9? Is it that Paul was not a Calvinist? No! Here it is: Paul was willing to do anything possible; within the means God has given him, and within the boundaries of God's moral Law, to surrender himself unto becoming a means of the grace of God. God alone saves...indeed, but here we have, first, a theology of means. God uses a means to accomplish all of His ends. And Paul subjected himself unto the end of being that means, in whatever way God would be pleased to use him. And in doing so, he could rightly say, "that I might save some." And furthermore, there is a theology of "passion" here. Paul was not a "cold-blooded," hyper calvinist, who said, "Well, God must save, so, I may as well sit back and let Him do the work that only He can do..." No, Paul loved souls and he went after them with a theology of God's sovereignty governing his mind, and a passion for the lost governing his heart. He pled with the lost; he gave up and forsook liberties or used them in any way that could wrap his heart around the lost in a way that they would know that he was sincere; he took every God-given resource he had, and he invested them in the winning of souls! And in doing so, he was a deadly, deadly weapon in the hands of his God!

Brethren, God wants us to be passionate for the lost, do you see that? Now, we may not have all of the right emotions swarming around in our hearts, but we can act by faith, out of a Christ centered passion. We can consciously consider the resources that God has given, or better yet, entrusted to us, such that we would spend them in the direction of edifying the brethren and winning lost souls to Christ! Are you a "soul winner," this morning? I am not asking you to name how many souls God has used you to bring to Christ, but rather do you have the mindset of a soul winner? At work...in your actions? At home? At church? In all of the mundane activities of life, which make up most of life...at the gym, the movies...etc, are you looking for ways to disperse your material and immaterial resources such that you might, by every means possible, win some to Christ?

Oh, may God give us a thunderous passion for the lost, and a fervent love for His church!

[The benefit we enjoy in this life, is sharing in the joy of other's salvation- vs. 23]

AMEN!!!

Benediction: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27