

## Gathering His People

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 9:19-23

More will be said later, from this passage, about partaking of the work of the gospel and fruitful labors. But it should first be made clear, at this point, that it is one thing to meet people who are already a part of the family of God, and to be involved with them and to love them. It is another thing to actively pursue the gathering in of God's people from all walks of life. It could be tempting to only recruit familiar people – the people whom you already know and like, the people with whom you feel comfortable. We need to be ready for the surprises and delights of discovering what Christ will do with people who, according to us, are unlikely, unlovely, and undesirable. Uneasy? Afraid? God may be challenging us to operate outside of our tastes, preferences, and comfort zone! By the way, this can also bring surprises that are not delightful. Disappointments and frustrated efforts are also a part of the bargain, when reaching out with the gospel. See II Corinthians 12:15 cp. II Corinthians 4:1-18; 6:1-10.

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– A four-part series on II Corinthians 6:11-13. (September-October 2021)

### **I Corinthians 9:19-23 – E Pluribus Unum = “*Out of many one*”**

The above statement (given in Latin and English) is a great ideal / a great motto for the United States of America, but it is also a great statement for the kingdom of Christ and the family of God. Paul dedicated himself to the work of going to all kinds of people and presenting the gospel to them. The goal was to unite them with the Triune God and with all other true believers in Christ (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:16, 22, 28-29; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 15:1-21; Ephesians 2:11-22; 6:18, 23-24; I Timothy 2:1-6; II Timothy 2:10; I John 1:1 – 2:2; Revelation 5:8-10 cp. Acts 9:10-16; 22:12-15; 26:19-22).

**I Corinthians 9:19** – Though Paul was first the servant of God / the servant of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10), yet he adopted the attitude of a servant who was sent to benefit men (I Corinthians 10:23-33; Ephesians 5:1-2 cp. Mark 10:42-45). [Book: “Slave” – J. MacArthur – Thomas Nelson]

**I Corinthians 9:20** – Though Paul was sent to the Gentiles (II Timothy 1:11; Acts 26:13-17), he also made sure to relate the gospel to his Jewish brethren. The Jews operated under the law of the old covenant of Moses. (Acts 26:17-21; 9:17-20; 13:38-46; 17:1-2, 10; Romans 1:16; 9:1-5; 10:1-4). They often mishandled that law / covenant.

**I Corinthians 9:21** – Paul's main calling was to reach those who did not have the background of the Old Testament Law. Such people were pagans / heathens (worshippers of a god / gods, idolaters, philosophers, etc., and also those who were just godless, materialistic, unspiritual people). See Acts 9:1-16; 22:1-21; 26:1-23; Ephesians 3:1-9; 4:17-19. Also, see Acts 10:1 – 11:18; Galatians 2:1-21; Acts 14:19 – 15:29 for some examples of how the Jewish / non-Jewish ministries interacted.

If you study Paul's sermons, you will see a distinct difference between how he spoke to Jewish people and how he spoke to non-Jewish people. With Jewish people, Paul did not have to introduce who the true God was. He did not have to establish the basic moral code of God, found in the law. Paul would go straight to the history of Israel and the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies and reveal Israel's failure to recognize and honor their Messiah, climaxed by His crucifixion and resurrection. The terms of the gospel, with its promises and warnings were then taught. See Acts **13:16-41**; 17:1-3; 26:19-20; Romans 1:16-18 cp. Galatians 3:24; John 5:21-24.

When talking to non-Jewish people, Paul had to establish the nature of the one-and-only true God. He also had to establish God's condemnation of sin. Then he could explain the sin problem and how it was to be reconciled by Christ's death and resurrection. Gospel promises and gospel warnings were then taught. See Acts 13: 42-52; 14:11-18; **17:18-31**; 24:25; Romans 1:16-18.

In I Corinthians 9:21 – Paul said that he became as *“Without law / Not under the law.”* This is not the same as *“lawlessness”* (I John 3:4 cp. I John 3:4-10 – RE: People who *“transgress / sin / commit sin,”* as a regular practice which they allow or tolerate). Paul related to people who knew nothing of the old covenant – its traditions and regulations. He acknowledged his moral responsibility to Christ, but was not going to entangle non-Jewish people with a system of law that was unique to the Jews.

There is much confusion about the subject of *“Law and Grace.”* Some suppose that we have no obligations to God's moral law because we are saved by grace (Jude 1:4). ***“Under the law”*** refers to the administration of the law by Moses. It also refers to the difference of doing things in the power of the flesh or in the power of the Spirit (Romans 6:14; 8:1-4; Galatians 5:16-18). ***“Under grace”*** is a higher law – the administration of Christ's Spirit in our heart (*“under the law to Christ”* – John 15:1-8; II Corinthians 5:14-17; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:14-19; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 2:6-10; 3:16; Hebrews 8:1-13; 13:9). See John 1:17; Romans 3:9-30; Galatians 3:10-14, 21-26; I Timothy 1:5-11.

**I Corinthians 9:22-23** – Many forms of weakness in people require us to use faith, grace, patience, and gentleness to reach them with the Gospel. Remember the gospel (not my willpower) is God's power to save, to bring men to repentance, and to create faith. **Paul's great desire was to share / to be a partaker of the gospel blessings with fellow believers.** These blessings come when we work together and are used of God to seek, to find, and to gather His people, from every walk of life, and bring them to saving faith. See I Corinthians 10:31-33; II Timothy 2:1, 8-10, 14-16, 22-26; Titus 3:2-9; James 1:18-20; Romans 1:13-17; 3:9-26; 10:8-17; Philippians 1:12-18, 27.

Despite Paul's list of categories, there are really only two kinds of people in the world: lost or saved, the natural man (those *“in the flesh”*) or the spiritual man (those *“in the spirit”*), those in Adam or those in Christ. See John 3:6-7; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 2:11-16; 15:22. We need to simplify our thinking, when looking at the types of people in the world, and realize that if they are lost, they will die in their sins and be lost forever. If they are saved, they are rescued from the second death, destined to become like Christ and live with Him forever. We should devote ourselves to rescuing people from eternal destruction and guiding them to life everlasting (II Corinthians 4:3-6; 5:17-21).