

1 Corinthians 9:15-27  
2 Kings 5  
Psalm 47

“All Things to All People”

June 15, 2014

Have you heard of the “Insider Movement”?

There’s a trend in missions today (especially missions to Muslims)  
to say that when a Muslim believes in Jesus,  
he can continue to practice Islam –  
and, in fact, they even point to stories of entire mosques  
that have become “worshippers of Jesus.”  
They are still Muslims – they follow all Islamic tenets and rituals –  
but they also believe in Jesus!

The Insider Movement likes to use Naaman as an example.

After all, when Naaman asks for a load of Israelite earth,  
so that he can offer burnt offerings to Yahweh,  
he adds his hope that Yahweh will pardon him  
if he worships in the house of Rimmon as well.  
And Elisha says, “Go in peace.” (*Shalom!*)

Now it’s true that Elisha is blessing him –

Elisha is saying that God’s peace will be on Naaman –  
even if Naaman participates in idolatrous rituals in a pagan temple.

What does this mean?

It means that sometimes things are not the way they should be!  
Elisha is not saying that it’s *okay* to worship other gods!  
There is nothing in 2 Kings 5 that suggests that we are being given a model for missions!  
In fact, the *problem* in 2 Kings 5 is that there is *no mission!*

What do you do when you are the only convert in your country?

If you stand up for your new faith, then you are going to die.

Not every Christian should be a martyr.

I do not expect every believer in Jesus in Muslim lands to come out of the mosque  
and die for their faith!

If a weak and timid believer (especially a new convert) comes to me and says,

“I’m the only believer in my city.  
If I profess my faith in Jesus publicly, then I will be killed.  
Can I continue in the mosque?”  
I would be inclined to say, “Shalom.”

Elisha has one convert more than 100 miles away in a foreign land.

“Shalom” – God’s peace be upon you, brother, as you endure patiently until the end.

But that is *not* our model for missions!

When God calls you out of darkness into light,  
he gives you a new identity – he also gives you a new community –  
a new community which brings “the princes of the peoples” together  
“as the people of the God of Abraham.”  
And so we sing in Psalm 47 of this new community that God is bringing together  
out of all tribes and nations and peoples –  
and knitting them together as *one people*.

Sing Psalm 47  
Read 1 Corinthians 9

### **Introduction: Those Who Preach the Gospel Should Get Their Living from the Gospel**

“I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”  
It is quite interesting to note that this famous statement  
comes in the middle of a section where Paul is explaining why Christians  
must *not* participate in idol feasts!  
To put it simply, you do not become an idolater to win idolaters.

1 Corinthians 8-11 deals particularly with the question of “food offered to idols.”

In chapters 8-9, we’ve seen that when Paul deals with the question of “food offered to idols,”  
he is not just talking about ancient superstitions.  
He is talking about questions of basic loyalties.  
In Corinth, if your patron invited you to the celebration of his son’s coming-of-age,  
the party would be held at a dining room connected with a pagan temple.  
It’s essentially the “temple restaurant.”  
The feast would be “barely” religious – *maybe* there would be a pagan priest  
doing his little ritual at the beginning,  
but if you arrived a few minutes late –  
you’d miss the worst parts.  
It’s really just a social gathering with a few religious ceremonies.

The question for Paul is not just the technical question of “was the food offered to idols?”  
The question is “what does your participation in this meal mean?”  
Not just to you, personally, individually –  
but to your *Christian* community –  
as well as to your *former* community!

Questions of “identity” and “community” are at the heart of what Paul is talking about.  
People in Corinth wanted to follow the example of Naaman –  
we can engage outwardly in the worship of Roman gods *and* still worship Jesus.

Now Paul says that *in one sense*, it’s true that you could eat meat sacrificed to idols –  
because an idol is *nothing* in the world;  
God made all things, and so all things are good.

Paul will say at the end of chapter 10,  
if you are at one of these dinners – eat whatever is set in front of you.  
But on the other hand, Paul recognizes that food has symbolic meaning as well.  
If eating this meal will identify me with *that group* and its deity,  
then I must not eat this meal.

In other words, if Naaman had been in Corinth,  
Paul would have said (and I suspect Elisha would have said):  
*No, you may not bow down in the temple of Rimmon.*

To the only convert in all of Syria, you say, “Go in peace, and may God have mercy on you!”  
But when you have a new community forming in Corinth,  
you need to draw them together into the “one, new man” in Christ Jesus.

And as we saw last time, these ideas about community, identity, and worship  
are intimately bound up with *finances* as well.

As Paul points out, temple offerings were the God-appointed way  
to support the priests and Levites in the OT.  
Temple offerings were also the way in which pagan priests were supported.

Therefore, the question of food offered to idols will have significant financial implications.  
If you are a Jew, then your offerings contribute financially to the temple in Jerusalem.  
If you are a Gentile, then your offerings contribute financially to the local temples.

So, now, if you are a Christian, then you contribute to the ministry of the gospel.  
As Paul says in 9:14,  
“In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel  
should get their living by the gospel.”

But now, in verses 15-18, Paul says that he himself has renounced these rights.

**1. Paul’s Boast: I Have Renounced This Right (v15-18)**

<sup>15</sup> *But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting.*

Paul has just made a strong case that the Corinthians *owe him*.  
But Paul does not want them to pay their debt *in money!*  
He wants them to pay their debt *by doing what he says!*

There is a certain moral high ground that he can hold,  
so long as he can claim financial independence.  
If the Corinthians become his patrons,  
then he will become dependent on them in a way that he deems detrimental to the gospel.

Paul is using himself as an example to them  
of what it means to forego rights for the sake of the gospel.

Paul will accept financial assistance from the *church* at Philippi.

But he rejects the patronage from Corinth.

Why?

He doesn't come out and say it explicitly,

but given Paul's concerns about patronage and "undo influence" in Corinth,  
his refusal of their gifts would indicate a rejection of party and faction.

After all, who is offering him money?

Probably not the Cephas faction.

Probably not the Apollos faction.

It would be the Paul faction! (1:12)

If he accepts their money, then he becomes a party to their faction.

He becomes "beholden" to them.

You can see this faintly in his defense in verses 16-18:

*<sup>16</sup> For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! <sup>17</sup> For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. <sup>18</sup> What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*

Why does Paul talk about "boasting"?

Back in chapter 1, verses 26-31, Paul had pointed to the way  
that God uses the weak things of the world to shame the strong –  
and the foolish things of the world to shame the wise –  
"so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.  
And because of him you are in Christ Jesus,  
who became to us wisdom from God,  
righteousness and sanctification and redemption,  
so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"

Paul does not want to encourage boasting in people – or boasting in parties or factions.  
Paul wants to show the Corinthians what it means to boast in the Lord.

After all, what's the thing that Paul boasts about?

It's not his preaching – he *has to do that*.

He boasts in his surrendering his rights.

While you Corinthians are boasting in your freedoms (boasting in your "rights"),

I, Paul, am boasting in my weakness – in my giving up of my rights.

If it sounds strange to us, that's only because we are so used to thinking of humility as a virtue.

In the Greco-Roman world, humility is *not* a virtue.

The “great man” of the ancient world was supposed to call attention to his accomplishments and great deeds.

Paul is doing something radical.

He is calling attention to his humility and sacrificial service.

He is called to be an apostle.

This stewardship that Christ has given him is not one that he can set aside of his own will.

Jesus did not come to Paul and say,

“You know, Paul, I think it would be a really good idea for you to become an apostle.

What do you think?”

Jesus called him to be an apostle and said, “Now, go to the Gentiles!”

Necessity was laid upon him.

I have to preach the gospel.

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.

I do not have “freedom” with respect to preaching the gospel.

Where do I have freedom?

Paul says, I can use my freedom to serve others – by working with my hands.

And I did this so that you can see the way of the cross – the way of the Lord Jesus.

Particularly Paul asks the strong – the wealthy – the powerful – to do this.

Those who have social and political and economic clout –

those who have “rights” – “authority” – should humble themselves.

You cannot tell a slave to give up his freedom – he doesn’t have any!

In the same way, you cannot tell the weak to give up their rights – they don’t have any!

Many of you live very privileged lives.

What rights are willing to surrender for the sake of the gospel?

How will you humble yourself?

Well, in order to help you think about *what* you will surrender,

perhaps we need to focus on *why*?

## **2. Paul’s Reason: “I Do It All for the Sake of the Gospel” (v19-23)**

<sup>19</sup> For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. <sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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.

In verses 19-23, Paul explains *why* he does not make use of his rights.

Notice the use of the subjunctive over and over again in this paragraph:

“that I might win more” (v19)  
“in order to win Jews...that I might win those under the law” (v20)  
“that I might win those outside the law” (v21)  
“that I might win the weak...that I might save some” (v22)  
“that I may share with them in its blessings” (v23).

The translation “win” may make it sound like Paul is setting up his athletic example, but the verb here is more focused on the economic side of things.

*Kerdaino* means “to make a profit” or “gain advantage” –  
it is the verb used by Jesus when says what will it profit a man  
if he *gains* the whole world, but loses his soul (Matt 16:26).

The other time it is used by Paul is “in order that I might gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8)  
And that points us towards the sense in which Paul uses it here.

Jesus says that if you go to your brother and show him his fault,  
then if he repents, you have *gained* your brother. (Matt 18:15)  
Likewise, Peter says that the wife who lives humbly before her unbelieving husband,  
may *win* him for the gospel without a word. (1 Peter 3:1)

So I’m okay with the translation “win” – so long as you think of “win” in an economic way.  
Because Paul is using a spiritual calculus that sees eternal “gain”  
as far more valuable than the minor financial hardships that he must endure.

Paul wants to see a new economy built out of this new community –  
an economy that transforms the old patronage networks  
into a new community of those who *share* in the gospel together.

In verse 19, Paul’s language is striking:  
“I have enslaved myself to all – even though I am free from all.”  
And it’s not just that I am free *in Christ*.  
Paul is a Roman citizen – and so when he says that he is “free” –  
he also includes his status as a “free” citizen in the Roman empire!

But I use that status as a free man – as a Roman citizen – to enslave myself to all.  
I do not use my status for my own selfish benefit.  
I use my status in the service of others.

I have a Ph.D.  
If I use my Ph.D. to intimidate people and show off my knowledge,  
then I am not imitating Paul as Paul imitates Christ!

Paul gives us an example of what it means to set aside our “rights” for the sake of the gospel.  
Notice what Paul does.

Paul does not sell himself into slavery in order to reach slaves  
(although some Christians have done this!).

Rather, he *uses* his freedom – he uses his status as a Roman citizen –  
and as an apostle of Jesus Christ –  
in order to put himself in situations  
where he can “win”/ “gain” others for the gospel.

But what does this look like?

To the Jews I became as a Jew.

**What does this mean!??**

After all, Paul *was* a Jew!

Why does he say, “I became *as a Jew*”?

That would be like Richard saying “To the Canadians I became as a Canadian”!

But such is the radical transformation of Paul’s identity in Christ  
that he *no longer considers himself a Jew*.

Let that sink in for a bit, will you? –

because if you don’t understand this, nothing else in the passage will make sense!

Who are you?

How do you identify yourself?

Do you think of yourself as an American? a Canadian?

Black? White? Dutch? Scottish?

It’s safe to say that Paul had *always* identified himself as a Jew.

Philippians 3 has a catalog of Paul’s former identity.

But Paul says that *now* he is no longer a Jew –

and so therefore, when he is around Jews, he becomes “as a Jew.”

When we talk about “becoming all things to all people”

we are not talking about a compromise of our core identity!

Paul’s new identity is in Christ.

I belong to Jesus.

What else belongs in that “core identity”?

Race? Ethnicity? Gender? Class?

NOTHING.

Who am I?

I belong to Jesus.

Therefore, because I am part of this new humanity that God is bringing together  
out of Jew and Gentile alike –

therefore, I can enter every part of human culture

*knowing* that in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

God was here first.

And to make clear what this means, he adds,

“To those under the law I became as one under the law” –  
even though he adds, “though not being myself under the law.”  
We see this in the book of Acts,  
where Paul will even offer sacrifices in the temple when he is in Jerusalem!

But he also says, “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).”

How does Paul think about the law?  
I am not under the law – in its Mosaic form.  
But I am under the law – in its Christian form!

I think people sometimes make it too complicated!  
Insofar as God’s law sets forth what is right and what is wrong,  
I am always under God’s law!  
Love God with all your heart.  
Love your neighbor as yourself.  
Love one another in the church.

Even in glory we will be “under” that law!

That’s why Paul says, “I am not outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ!”  
So Paul can eat kosher and offer sacrifices at the temple when he is around observant Jews –  
and yet Paul can eat bacon in a Gentile’s home.

And yet Paul adds one more:  
“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak.”

After all, Paul wants to see the Corinthians giving preference to each other.

As he started the whole section in 8:3,  
“But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.”

Love God – and therefore, give preference to one another.  
Don’t just “clump” with people who share your interests!  
If all the Notre Dame students hang out over here,  
and all the young mothers hang out over there,  
and all the older folks have their little group,  
then we are well on our way towards factions and parties.

It’s not enough to be *passive* in “not asserting your rights.”  
Paul is saying that we should self-consciously, actively, seek to identify with the *other*.  
It’s not enough that we welcome them into “our” world.  
We must seek to enter into their world  
because we are *those whose identity is found in Christ* –  
the one who entered into our world.



Notice that Paul does not *lie* about who he is.

The Jews in Jerusalem knew full well that Paul consorted with Gentiles!  
Paul may be observing OT food laws when he is with strict Jews,  
but they all know that when he is with Gentiles, he is *not* observing food laws.

Being all things to all people does not mean being sneaky or duplicitous.

The core of who Paul is – Paul’s identity in Christ – does not change;  
and the message that Paul preaches – the gospel of Jesus Christ! – does not change.

And, perhaps just as important for the debate about the Insider Movement these days,  
when Paul speaks or writes to new converts,  
he calls them to *leave* their old identity and become a part of the people of God.  
If you are a Christian, then you cannot be a Jew anymore.  
If you are a Christian, then you cannot be a Roman anymore.

You can be *as* a Jew – you can be “like” an American –  
but you cannot *be* a Jew – you cannot *be* an American –  
your basic core identity is found in Christ;  
your formative community is found with those who love him.

Paul is no longer a Jew.

He *has* a Jewish ethnicity, which he can use in the service of the gospel.  
Likewise, Paul *has* a Roman citizenship, which he can use in the service of the gospel.  
He *has* a male body, which he can use in the service of the gospel.

And from that stance, Paul can enter into *any* community without fear.

Notice that Paul does not say, “to the sinner, I became a sinner”!  
He does not say, “to the Zeus-worshiper, I became a Zeus-worshiper”  
or “to the drunkard, I became a drunkard.”

He is not entering these communities in disguise.

He’s entering *in love*.

Read:

<sup>23</sup> *I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*

The Greek just says “in order that I may become a fellow-partaker.”

The point is very simple.

Paul does everything for the sake of the gospel,  
in order to show what the gospel is!

That the gospel is an all-encompassing new reality that re-orientes you to Jesus!

You used to be an American – but now you belong to Jesus.

Your identity is not determined by your ethnicity, your gender, your “sexual orientation.”

Your identity is determined by Jesus.

And that's why Paul admonishes the Corinthians, in verses 24-27:

### **3. Paul's Admonition: Run that You May Obtain the Prize (v24-27)**

<sup>24</sup> *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.* <sup>25</sup> *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.* <sup>26</sup> *So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.* <sup>27</sup> *But I discipline my body and keep it under control,<sup>[b]</sup> lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

We're still talking about the question of food offered to idols.

Christians need to exercise self-control and discipline in our pursuit of Christ.

Chapter 9 uses an example from Paul's life and ministry.

Chapter 10 will use an example from Israel's history.

Training...discipline...self-control.

Corinth was the host of the Isthmian Games –

one of the largest athletic competitions in the Roman empire.

Paul draws on this in his to illustrate his point.

When I was in high school, I was a distance runner.

I was doing pretty well in the two-mile,

and I was looking forward to the sectional meet on Saturday.

But Friday night my youth group was going to an amusement park.

Walking around the amusement park and staying up late on Friday

is *not* good preparation for running 2 miles on Saturday.

But I lacked discipline.

I lacked self-control.

So I went to the amusement park on Friday –

and I ran at least 30 seconds slower than normal in the 2-mile on Saturday.

Athletes discipline their bodies in order to prepare for their contest.

One evening of self-indulgence can ruin months of preparation.

And even so, *you* need to be disciplined in your pursuit of Christ.

Bodily discipline is useful.

Bodily discipline is useful for orienting yourself towards others.

My bodily desires and appetites are *not my master*.

Jesus is my master!

And so I train my body – I organize my daily life – in the service of Christ.

Paul has been urging the Corinthians to “set aside their rights” for the sake of the weak.

The discipline that Paul expects of the “strong”

is that they will eat less meat,

because they will abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols.

They will have fewer Gentile patrons in Corinth,

because they will not join in the idol-feasts at the temple restaurants.

There's a juicy steak on the grill at the temple of Asclepius –  
and all your old drinking buddies are getting together for a night on the town –  
it's only a couple, little sins that you'd have to commit,  
and you'd be able to “be all things to all people”!

Do you see what Paul has done?

By using himself as an example,  
Paul has undercut the Corinthians' claim to an “evangelistic” use of idolatry!  
Being “all things to all people” means that the Jesus-centered *you*  
can go into any situation with love and compassion,  
setting aside your rights and privileges –  
but *not* setting aside the law of Christ!

It may sound strange that Paul says that “only one receives the prize” (v24) –  
but the point of Paul's illustration should be clear:  
we are not racing against each other!  
We are racing towards the finish line –  
and only the one who perseveres to the end will win.

Everyone who crosses the finish line wins!  
The one who perseveres until the end will be saved!

That's why Paul says that “I discipline my body and keep it under control,  
lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (v27)

Disqualified from what?

Many try to say that Paul is just talking about “reward.”  
But all you have to do is look at the next few verses,  
and you can see that Paul is talking about eternal life.

Paul understands that if he abandons his path,  
if he turns away from Christ, and becomes an idolater, sexually immoral, greedy,  
a drunkard, a reviler, a swindler – then he will be disqualified –  
because those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (6:9-10).

As he will say in the next chapter,  
“Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” (10:12)  
And he urges the Corinthians to “flee from idolatry” (v14) and flee to Jesus,  
as he is offered to us in the Lord's Supper (v16-17)

Your hope is not in what *you* have done (or what you can do),  
your hope is in what Jesus has done – so keep your eyes fixed on Jesus!