

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The word of God for this morning is from 1 Corinthians 9:16-23.

“16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. 19 For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; 21 to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.”

So far our text. Dear fellow redeemed.

Have you ever been caught in the middle of two people's opinions in how something should be done? It can be a very hard situation to deal with. Often situations come up where you're in the middle and the people on the opposite sides are very close to you. Very often they're people you love. If you don't love these people they can at least have a large impact on your life.

The work place is a common place for this to happen. Decisions need to be made. Even if they're not being made by you, opinions will be prevalent amongst the employees. These things usually make for some very heated conversations.

I know that when some decision came down from management I would often scratch my head and wonder how this change could really help. But I would leave the matter alone. People were put in charge because of the abilities that they had and they had access to information I didn't.

But inevitably these choices would be scrutinized and differing opinions would be voiced. One group had this opinion and another, the opposite opinion. And then came the question, "What do you think?" And then people on both sides would be waiting for your response on where you stand.

This type of situation can occur within friendships as well. Although I believe we try the best we can questions and comments arise as to the personality and habits of certain people. I heard someone comment once that while in college the statement of 'You can't be friends with us if you continue to be friends with so and so' was an all too frequent thing.

Family groups as well experience this type of struggle. People again have differing opinions and you can feel as though you don't belong because of being caught in the middle. And from time to time this situation can even arise in our church family as well.

But how do we deal with situations like these? Do we simply choose a side to make things easier on ourselves? Do we examine which group of people means the most to us and set up camp with them? And do we think that we can somehow salvage the relationship of the other side at a later time?

Sometimes though being on both sides is the right thing to do. Often we feel that if I don't pick a side we're being weak. But our text reveals to us that it is truly OK to **"Be all things to all men."** And for what better purpose than for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul had a situation to deal with that is very foreign to us. Having both Jews and Gentiles in many of the congregations of the early church caused differing of opinions on many things. The eating of certain foods and circumcision were very common examples that we see addressed throughout many of the letters the Holy Spirit had John send. These things were used by the unscrupulous men who were trying to subvert grace by making circumcision a means of salvation.

But after having a tradition for so long many believing Jews struggled with not needing to be circumcised. And when the mix of Jew and Gentile came about the Jews knew that the Gentiles were not circumcised and they knew that many were not getting circumcised. This brought about the differing of opinions and factions arose.

Paul was now in the middle, both Jew and Gentile waiting for a response. Paul begins his answer this way. **"16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel."**

Paul couldn't do anything else but preach the Gospel. He said that this compulsion was so strong that he called it a necessity. That is truly easy to understand considering his experience on the road to Damascus. But what truly compelled Paul was the love of souls; the same love that was shown to him by Jesus Christ Himself. And the fact that Paul was preaching the Gospel was the thing that allowed him to remain centered and make decisions that were pleasing to the Lord. He was basically telling both the Jews and Gentiles involved that he was going to be faithful to God and not to take sides in a sinful way.

Paul said, **"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more."** Paul completely understood the freedom he had in Christ. At one time Paul was a Pharisee and earlier in his life was condemned by the false laws and regulations of that sect of Judaism. Once freed by Christ he was free to eat and drink what he wanted.

But Paul willingly chose to place himself at the mercies of others. To go so far as be a servant to all men. Not for the purpose of making his life easier but for the sake of the Gospel of Christ. So that he might win more souls for the Kingdom of God.

He said this of the Jews, **"And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law."** The love for his Jewish brethren was well known to them. Although the vast majority of the Jews rejected Christ as the

Messiah Paul desired, as Christ did that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. This desire went this far.

Acts 16:1 **“Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.”**

Paul could've gone on the trip without circumcising Timothy but to **“Be all things to all men”** Paul and Timothy went that far for the sake of the Jews. They didn't want Timothy's lack of circumcision to get in the way of preaching the Gospel to them. Timothy subjected himself to the pain of being circumcised as an adult because of love for lost souls.

And of the Gentiles Paul said, **“To those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law.”**

Just as with the Jews Paul had a special circumstance with the Gentiles. This was a completely different society living alongside the Jews. The Jews were as big of a turn off to the Gentiles as the Gentiles were to the Jews. But for the sake of the Gospel Paul decided to **“Be all things to all men.”**

The Gentile people were basically free to eat anything they wanted to. Whereas to a Jew many still felt bound to the Levitical Law. But in the Gospel Paul knew he had the freedom to eat. So he would eat freely with the Gentiles and not eat certain things with the Jews if they were weak.

Paul didn't force his Jewish heritage onto the Gentiles making laws for them that didn't exist. If he were he would've gone back to his Pharisaical heritage. Paul said these things.

Rom. 14:21 **“It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.”**

1 Cor. 8:13 **“Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”**

Would you be willing to go that far to **“Be all things to all men?”** Would you give up eating meat out of love for another?

In our society we have great freedoms and access to the world markets. Anything we want we can get. We have become used to doing things as we see fit. If we want to eat meat, we eat it. If we choose not to eat meat, we have that freedom as well. This idea is truly foreign to us. But there are some situations where the situation Paul dealt with might come to pass.

The nation is seeing a great increase in the number of religions in which the eating of meat is something that is regulated or even strictly forbidden. These people not because of their eating habits but because of the false religions they follow are in the need of the Gospel.

Do we ignore these people? Do we feel as though they are a lost cause? Are we willing to witness to them only when it fits our needs? Do we arrogantly and pride fully stay away from eating with them because of the restrictions they have on food? I pray that we wouldn't.

But we would do it for one reason, **“Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.”**

Our lives just like the life of Paul should revolve around the Gospel. We know the importance of it. We hold it and treasure it as the greatest thing in our lives. If you want to know the importance of the Gospel to the person sitting next to you, simply look at how important it is to yourself. And that is the very thing we should desire in the hearts of every man. To be as Paul says in our text partakers of it with others.

Jesus Himself is our perfect example how to **“Be all things to all men.”** Phil. 2:5 **“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”**

Jesus is God. The One and only man who had every right to be Himself and no one could truly take Him to task on it. He is perfect. But even God didn't parade around revealing His full power. The word 'robbery' that we find means to seize plunder. This word was used of kings who conquered their enemy and went through the capital cities on parade. They would display the plunder and the captured soldiers. They were flexing their muscles showing how brilliant they were. But Jesus chose to be a servant. He chose to come as a man.

But our Lord simply didn't make use of His full glory as our example. He made Himself the ultimate example of what being a servant is. He humbled Himself to the point of death. And He did this for the sake of His Father.

What a wonderful God we have. To lay down His life for us. To live a perfect life on our behalf. To give His righteousness to us. To provide His Holy Spirit so that you can believe in what He has done for you. To be free from spiritual want. And to have your future secured with Him forever in Heaven.

“Be all things to all men” so that all may have this wonderful gift of eternal life just as you have it. Amen.

Phil 4:7 **“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”**