

## All Things to All People to Save Some

### 1 Corinthians 9:7-12, 19-23 (EHV)

<sup>7</sup> What soldier ever serves at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat some of its fruit? Or who takes care of a flock and does not drink milk from the flock? <sup>8</sup> Am I saying this just from a human point of view? Doesn't the law also say this? <sup>9</sup> Yes, it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out grain." Is God really concerned about oxen, <sup>10</sup> or does he say this entirely for our sake? Yes, it was written for our sake, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher ought to thresh in hope of getting a share. <sup>11</sup> If we sowed spiritual seed for your good, is it too much if we reap material benefits from you? <sup>12</sup> If others have some right to make this claim on you, don't we even more? But we did not use this right. Instead, we endure everything so as not to cause any hindrance for the gospel of Christ. <sup>19</sup> In fact, although I am free from all, I enslaved myself to all so that I might gain many more. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews, I became like a Jew so that I might gain Jews. To those who are under the law, I became like a person under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might gain those who are under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those who are without the law, I became like a person without the law (though I am not without God's law but am within the law of Christ) so that I might gain those who are without the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak, I became weak so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all people so that I may save at least some. <sup>23</sup> And I do everything for the sake of the gospel so that I may share in it along with others.

We have rights. I'm not talking so much about rights outlined in the US Constitution, but certain universal rights for God's people that transcend individual government and culture. Paul spends verses 7-12 supporting both from observations of the world and from God's Word that a preacher of the Gospel has the right to be financially supported for doing so.

However, Paul does not make use of this right. Why not? **"But we did not use this right. Instead, we endure everything so as not to cause any hindrance for the gospel of Christ."** (verse 12b) Paul knew that some people in Corinth would think that he was only preaching Jesus to earn a paycheck and nothing more. (Aren't we tempted to think the same when we see certain megachurches and evangelists who own their own private jets?) But also Paul wanted to show how grateful he was to God by voluntarily preaching the Gospel of Christ free of charge.

He then goes even further and explains that he gives up more rights in his ministry. **"In fact, although I am free from all, I enslaved myself to all so that I might gain many more."** (verse 19) Paul was not anyone's slave. He had been freed by Christ. Jesus Christ had come into the world, lived under the law and kept it for Paul, adhering to all the Old Testament ceremonial laws for things like a kosher diet, circumcision, and the religious festivals. Paul was freed from adherence to these laws because Christ had fulfilled them. He was also freed from sin and slavery to sin when Christ sacrificed his life in place of Paul's. Paul was a new creation, covered in perfection, because Christ had accomplished everything for him. He belonged only to Christ, no one else.

In that freedom, Paul voluntarily enslaved himself to other people - giving up things that he can rightly expect and demand - for the sole purpose that the Gospel of Christ would not be hindered and that other people would hear it and come to believe in Christ for the freedom from their sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. **"I have become all things to all people so that I may save at least some."** (verse 22b) This doesn't mean that Paul was silent about sin or condoned it or participated in it, but that he met people where they were at, no matter how much of a messy sinner they were.

Paul had the right to demand that the Jews stop following all those laws of the kosher diet, the religious festivals, etc., because they foreshadowed Christ and now they were all fulfilled. But he didn't. He actually followed them to meet them where they were at and share with them what Christ had done. Paul could have demanded that the Gentiles - who did not grow up with the Old Testament laws - stop eating food sacrificed to false gods and get circumcised, but he didn't. He met them where they were at, even though this was something very different and maybe uncomfortable for him to do. Paul gave up his rights so that he could gain a hearing to share Jesus. **"And I do everything for the sake of the gospel so that I may share in it along with others."** (verse 23)

Do we give up our rights to become all things to all people, meeting them where they are at, in order to share what Christ has done for them? If someone called you up or a neighbor stopped over or a friend and asked, "What does your church teach about the LGBTQ community?", what would you say? It'd be easy to exercise our right to judge based on the Word of God, to quote Romans 1:26-27 or 1 Corinthians 6:9, and say nothing more than engaging in homosexuality is a sin and contrary to God's Word. Case closed. Let's move on. We can't and don't tolerate sin at church because God doesn't tolerate sin, right?

It's true that God doesn't tolerate sin, but is a quick judgment of people becoming all things to all people to win some? Because it's also true that God pays for sin by coming to our level to do so. Christ was free and had every right to demand of us, of every person, that we clean up our act, elevate our own status, and make our dwelling with him. He had every right to judge us, condemn us, dismiss us until we did just that. If Christ had chosen to exercise that right, we'd all go to hell, be cast into outer darkness. But Christ did not make use of these rights as God. Instead, he made himself a slave to us by coming to our level. Though immortal, he became mortal. Though lacking nothing, he took on a human body and felt hungry and thirsty and tired. Though living in painless perfection, he came to us and felt the nails pounded into his hands, the crown of thorns piercing his skull, the blood flowing out of his body as he was numbered with the transgressors. Christ enslaved himself for all of us to take our sins away.

Not only did Christ enslave himself to us to be our perfect sacrifice for sin, but he also enslaved himself to be our perfect substitute and fill us with his perfection. Jesus became all things to all people to share with them his saving work. He sat and ate with sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes. The Pharisees and the "righteous," the good religious folk, stayed away from those kinds of sinful people, expecting them to do better and elevate themselves. Jesus, however, did not make use of this right and instead met them where they were at. He did this, not condoning their sins, but telling them that he was here to take away their sins, to give them new life free from the slavery of sin. He didn't wait for them to clean up their lives before he reached out to them. On the other side, Jesus also ate with the Pharisees, the hypocritical religious folks who thought that they could elevate themselves to God by what they did. He didn't wait for them to figure out that they could never make themselves right with God. He told them that he was the only Way, Truth, and Life. Jesus did not cast away the weak or the doubting, waiting for them to show some faith. He came to them and showed them that he was their Savior so that they would have faith in him. Christ became all things to all people so that they would be saved.

So, how do I answer that phone call, that neighbor, that friend? So I have nothing to do with the person associated with the LGBTQ community? Do I quickly judge them as immoral and make them change before I interact with them, share myself with them? Being all things to all people so that we might win some, we give up that right. Instead, we come to them and tell them the wonderful truth that we know. We know that God made the world perfect, made us male and female in his perfect image. But we chose to sin and mess it all up. We brought brokenness, sin, into our world. Sinful people beget sinful people. Our world is totally broken with sin today. This is why you suffer from gender dysphoria, why you struggle with feeling as if you are in the wrong body, struggle with same sex attraction, struggle for acceptance. However, God chose to love us in spite of our sins, when we were unlovable. God loved you so much that he lived perfectly for you, died for you, took the punishment we deserved, all to cover you with his perfection so that your identity is not your gender or your sexual attraction, but is Christ. We don't come to church because we are put together; we come because we're broken and we need God to fix us. We are a hospital for sinners, and every single one of us is a patient. In short, God made us, every single one of us, including those who identify with the LGBTQ community, and he also saved all of us.

This probably won't be a comfortable conversation for us. But when you hear that person's voice, when you look them in the eye, see a soul like yours, a soul that needs a Savior, a soul who needs to know how completely they are loved by God. I've been asked this question by someone in the LGBTQ community more than once, and this made me spend a lot of time searching the Bible, talking with pastors, reading books, meeting and talking to other people within this community. I did this to understand what they were going through, to meet them where they are at, to be all things to all people so that I can share the Gospel with them. Had I just exercised my right to judge them, had I held myself at a distance before they got their act together, so to speak, would they ever have heard what God had done for them?

It's a lot easier to judge and dismiss a person because they're not like you, don't wrestle with what you wrestle with, don't believe as you believe. But that's not being all things to all people to save at least some. If you are wondering if you are putting God's words into practice, ask yourself what you see when you see people. Do you see a soul who needs the love of Jesus, a soul who is loved by God completely and totally, or do you only see someone not like you? Do you look at them and keep your distance until you think they will be like you? Forgive us, Lord, when we dismiss people and force them to come to our level instead of going to them on theirs.

Christ willingly put aside his rights and enslaved himself to us to save us. Paul met people where they were at so that he could share that message with them and save at least some. Being freed from sins and made perfect by our Savior, we follow their example and be all things to all people, to see all people as those loved so completely by Christ, and meet them where they are at, whoever they are, however different they are from us, so that they can have the same Jesus and forgiveness and perfection and eternal life in heaven that we have. Amen.