

All things to all People (Proverbs 25:28 & 1 Corinthians 9:1-27)

03-May-20

We're looking at 1 Cor chapter 9 - please have your Bibles open.

Let me ask God to give us understanding of His Word; Let's pray...

Intro

[PowerPoint 1-Hudson Taylor]

Hudson Taylor - was a British Protestant Christian missionary - born on 21/5/1832 and died 3/6/1905 - founder of China Inland Mission (CIM) - now known as Overseas Mission Fellowship (OMF).

He served the Lord in China for 51 years

No other missionary since the Apostle Paul had a wider vision and carried out a more systematic plan of evangelizing a geographical area than Hudson Taylor.

He was sensitive to Chinese culture - he adopted wearing native Chinese clothing even though it was rare among missionaries of that time. He even let his hair grow long and wore it in a braid down his back. He learnt and preached in several Chinese languages - including Mandarin, Teochew - and the Wu dialects of Shanghai and Ningbo. And helped prepare a NT in one of those dialects.

Why would Hudson Taylor do that?

Because he wanted to be "real" to the Chinese people, he was sharing the Gospel with. [Explain Gospel]

As Christians, we have freedom to share the Gospel in the context we're in.

The **Apostle Paul** touched on this freedom last week at the end of chapter 8 - when he said **he had the freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols - but he would give up this freedom to eat meat - if it was to cause a fellow brother or sister in Christ to stumble.**

Paul was **sensitive to others around him** - for the sake of the **Gospel of Jesus**.

Here in our chapter this morning - Paul **explores this freedom we have as Christians**

Using this Christian freedom, Paul says in verse v22 (**the key verse**) - **he has become all things to all people.**

What does Paul mean by saying he has **become all things to all people?**

It means firstly - **we have rights as Christians** - that's in verses 1 to 14

We have rights as Christians (vv1-14)

[PowerPoint 2-Rights]

In these **first few verses**, Paul explains his rights as a **Christian and as an Apostle**

V1 - He is **free** - as a Christian he is **free from the Jewish ceremonial laws and traditions** he grew up in - and **free from Jewish food restrictions.**

He is also an **Apostle** - someone called directly by Jesus.

Paul can claim this as **he met the resurrected Jesus** as he walked the road to **Damascus** - and **Jesus called Paul** to bring the **Gospel** to the **Gentiles** (non-Jews)

And Paul can **point to the church of Corinth** (as well as **churches** in Galatia, Ephesus and Thessalonica) as **proof of his apostleship**

Although as he says in v2 - some might think he's not an apostle

Perhaps because a) he **wasn't with Jesus'** during Jesus' ministry; b) & because Paul was a **persecutor** of Christians before he believed in Jesus - so **people** were **suspicious & skeptical of him**; c) & because he **didn't take wages** for his Gospel work - so people didn't think he was a "real" apostle

As a **Gospel worker**:

- Paul says he has the **right to receive food and drink** (v4)
- And the **right to bring** along a believing **wife with him in ministry** (v5) if he **chooses** (although **Paul preferred** to remain **unmarried** (1 Cor 7:7) - so he could serve the Lord unhindered)
- And he has the **right to not work for a living** if he chooses - and to be **supported by the church**
- [**Mention my stipend - I'm paid not to work - so I can do ministry**]
- **Paul chooses not to be paid by the church but he defends the rights of ministry workers - to be paid** - and he gives **three reasons** (v7)
 - **Soldiers** - get supported by the army
 - **Vineyard workers** - get free grapes and wine
 - **Farmers** - get their pick of crops or milk
- The **right to be paid is not just Paul's opinion** (v8) - it's in the **OT** (v9)
- He quotes **Deut 25:4** - **Do not muzzle an ox while treading out grain**
- What this means is - as the **ox is ploughing** the field - it is **free to eat** the **grain lying** on the **ground**
- **Paul's point** is (v10) - this **OT law** was **written** for **human's benefit** - so that **anyone who sows and plows** - is **entitled** to a **share** of the **harvest**

- So, if a **Gospel worker** - sows the spiritual seed of **God's word** - they are **entitled** to reap some **material harvest** as well as **spiritual** (v12)
- Even the **priests in the OT** - who belonged to the **Levi tribe** - who had **no land to grow food** - relied on being **fed** by the **other tribes** of Israel - as they made **sacrifices** to the Lord
- Therefore (v14) - in the same way **Gospel workers today** are **entitled** to be **supported**

Application:

For us - as **Christians** - we **have rights** too:

- a. We are **called by God** (Rom 8:28-30)
- b. We are **children of God** (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1)
- c. We have an **eternal inheritance** - the **Holy Spirit** living inside us has **stamped or sealed** us with a **guarantee** of **forgiveness** and **eternal life** in Heaven (Eph 1:13-14)
- d. We are **ambassadors** for Jesus (2 Cor 5:20)
- e. If we **work in ministry** - we have the **right to be paid too**
- f. We are **free** too: free from the **slavery to sin** - free from the **bondage of God's law** which we can't fully keep - the **law simply shows us** our sin and our need for **Jesus as our Saviour** - and because of Jesus we are **free from the punishment of sin**
- g. We also have **Christian freedom** to **eat or drink** whatever we like - free to do what we like on the **Sabbath** - **free to wear** what we like - but in that freedom we need to **consider others** - so that our freedom doesn't cause **other Christians** to struggle or **stumble**

Now - even though like Paul - we have all these rights and freedom

The second point - here in chapter 9 - is that **if we are to be all things to all people** - we might choose to **give up some of these rights** (obviously not giving up the rights of forgiveness and eternal life) but we might choose to **give up some of our rights** for the sake of sharing the Gospel - that's in verse 12b & vv15-23

That's what Hudson Taylor did - he gave up his comfortable home & pay in England - and went to China - he had the right to wear his British clothes and speak English - but for the sake of the Gospel - he gave up those rights...

We can choose to give up some of these rights for the sake of the Gospel (v12b, vv15-23)

[PowerPoint 3-give up rights]

At the end of v12 and in v15 - Paul says he chose to give up the right to be paid

Why?

Paul's **sole purpose** is for the **Gospel** to go out **unhindered**

- a. If Paul gets paid by the Church at Corinth - this could be a financial burden to them
- b. It might also limit Paul's ministry - if he's dependent on the Church at Corinth - as he was called to spread the Gospel - not just in Corinth - but throughout the Roman Empire - and he's able to support himself through his tentmaking business

- c. For Paul - he's not in ministry to get something out of it for himself - he's **compelled to do it** - and his reward and delight is preaching the Gospel and **seeing the fruit** that comes from it
- d. In fact - v19 - he sees himself as a **servant** - he's prepared to be a slave - so he can win more people for Jesus

And so, Paul coins the phrase in v22 - "*I have become all things to all people*"

What does Paul mean by this phrase?

He gives a few examples:

- a. V20 - when hanging out with **Jewish people** - he acts like a Jew - he celebrates their **feasts and traditions**. Why? So, he can win Jews for Jesus. One time he **circumcised** his companion Timothy (Acts 16:3) so the Jews would **accept Timothy's ministry**; another time Paul cut his hair and **made a vow** (Acts 18:18); another time he **celebrated the Passover** (Acts 20:6) - all in order to help more Jews to believe in Jesus
- b. V21 - another example of all things to all men - to those without the Law - the **Gentiles** (non-Jews) - Paul became like a non-Jew - not bogged down in Jewish law and traditions - but note - still under the law of Christ (loving God and loving others)
- c. V22 - another example - when hanging out with the weak - those in Corinth who had a **weak conscience** and were weak in knowledge - and thought food sacrificed to idols was a problem - Paul gave up his freedom to eat this food and became weak like them (1 Cor 8:13) - to win them for Jesus

That's what Paul means by "all things to all people"

But there must be some limits

We can't say - to the adulterer I became like an adulterer - to the prostitute

I became like a prostitute - to the child molester, I became like a child

molester - to the drunkard, I became like a drunkard

"all things to all people" is a balance between faithful obedience to God and
flexibility with our rights

Illustrations:

I grew up in Ireland and England - the English learn to keep about a yard away from each other when having a conversation. If you go to Latin America - they learn it's about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft. If I have a conversation with a Latin American - they're moving closer - I'm backing off. I think they're pushy - they think I'm distant. I stick my foot out to stop them advancing - they stand on it.

When I came to Australia - I soon learnt - in Australia - they cut down tall poppies. Nobody is supposed to get puffed up. Aussies don't mind insulting anyone - even a minister - he's got to be one of them - he's got to be a mate. Even the kids in school call me Paul - not Mr. O'Rourke. If I go to Singapore - they call me Mr. Paul. If I go to the Pacific Islands, they call me Reverend Paul.

The point is - "being all things to all people" - means we might have to give up some of rights - and get out of our comfort zone.

We have to be "real" - and share our lives - warts and all.

Paul's saying sharing the Gospel is not just a verbal exercise.

We need to be Gospel shaped people who are not afraid of losing a few rights, not afraid of bit of suffering or discomfort, in order that people come to know Jesus

Which brings us to the third point - *in being all things to all people* - we have to have spiritual discipline - that's in verses 24 to 27

We have to have spiritual discipline (vv24-27)

[PowerPoint 4-Spiritual Discipline]

To explain the idea of spiritual discipline - Paul uses the picture of an Olympic runner in a race.

Now remember Corinth is in Greece - where the Olympic Games originated.

Ancient Olympic games were held in honour of the Greek God - Zeus - the sky and thunder God - who rules as king of the gods on Mount Olympus

In Corinth, they had the Isthmian games (named after the isthmus (narrow strip of land with sea on either side where Corinth is located) - the Isthmian

Games were held the year before and year after the Olympic Games

So, the Corinthians were very used to the idea of running races

Paul says - all the runners in the race - run to win the prize

All the athletes train hard - they do it - so they get the chance to win the winners crown - an olive wreath

Paul says being a disciplined Christian is like being a runner in one of these races

We don't run the race for fun - we run the race to win!

We need to run hard as a Christian to win the prize - this has the idea of being committed and active as a Christian - not lazy and half-hearted - our race should be a fulfilling race - as we look to win others for Jesus.

But unlike the runners in the Olympic race - our crown is not a wreath that perishes - our crown is an eternal one - it lasts forever in Heaven.

So, Paul says we need to run our Christian race with great self-discipline Not running around aimlessly - like a headless chook - we need to be focused on Jesus - and leading people to Him

We're not to be like a boxer punching fresh air - we need to be disciplined - making our body a slave under our control - all - so that people are encouraged to follow Jesus

Paul concludes that we need spiritual discipline so we get our reward - and don't get disqualified for the prize (v27)

Paul's not talking about losing out on our salvation [[once saved always saved - John 10:28-29](#)] - what Paul means is we could miss out on our reward for our Christian service.

Paul wasn't afraid that he would be disqualified from salvation, but he knew that it was possible for him to live in such a way that he would stand disapproved of before the Judgment Seat of Christ. He might waste his time on secondary things; he might commit sin which, although confessed and forsaken, would cause him to lose opportunities and time which could never be regained.

We must understand that

everything we do,
everything we say,

everything we think,
everything we are,
relates to God.

Each act, each word, each thought, each moment of life contains the possibility of sin.

Each sin, is like a coin with two sides. If a Christian tells a lie, the "heads" side is sin, the "tails" side is the work that produced that sin. The sin side has been dealt with forever by the death of our Lord Jesus, but the work side will have to be brought before Jesus at His Judgment Seat.

As Paul says in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians - in 2 Cor 5:10

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may **receive what is due us** for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

So, the bottom line is - in our spiritual life we need to be disciplined like an athlete training for the Olympics.

We need to be:

- a. *Purposeful in our quiet times*
- b. *Identifying areas of sin/temptation and seek devotions and scriptures to help in these areas*
- c. *Being committed to prayer*
- d. *Actively seeking to share the Gospel with others*

Our Response

But - how should we apply Paul's principle of being "*all things to all people*" - to our lives?

- How would we share the Gospel with a *homeless person*?
- A *Muslim*?
- A *rich atheist business man*?
- A *beer drinking, gambling Aussie*?
- A *migrant from the Pacific Islands*?

Hopefully these techniques will help us to “*become all things to all people*”:

[PowerPoint 5-Response]

1. **Listen**. We are often too eager to share our own thoughts, especially when we know the other person needs to hear about Jesus. One common mistake is to jump into a conversation before we really hear what the other person is saying. As James 1:19 says “*be quick to listen, slow to speak*”.

We all appreciate being heard; when we extend that courtesy to someone else, they are more likely to listen to what we have to say. By listening first, the other person becomes an individual we care about rather than simply a “mission field object” to convert.

2. **Be kind**. This should go without saying for Christians, but, unfortunately, we can forget to be kind in the excitement of the moment we can forget our manners. As 1 Corinthians 13 says “*love is patient and kind and not easily angered*”. Kindness and respect never go out of fashion and are always appropriate.

3. **Be sensitive to culture**. Trained missionaries know that, before they can reach a cultural group, they must understand the culture. The same is true for every believer, even if we never leave our own country. Our own culture is

rapidly changing with migrants from all over the world. We need to understand culture first. We don't have to approve of every part of a culture to understand it and to reach those immersed in it. By first listening to discern where people are at spiritually and then finding common ground with them - we may be able to reach someone searching for the truth.

4. Deal with prejudices. Prejudice of every kind has been part of human history since the beginning. Despite how hard we try; we all carry some form of prejudice against certain other people groups. Ironically, even those who condemn prejudice of any sort are usually quite prejudiced against those they consider prejudiced! Admitting to God our own pride and repenting of judgmental attitudes and lack of love should be an ongoing process for Christians wanting to follow Paul's example of being all things to all people. As a former Jew & Pharisee; Paul had to put aside his own prejudice against Gentiles in order to spread the gospel to the people Jesus had called him to.

5. Be Gospel Focused - Paul kept the Gospel at the centre of his method and at the centre of his message. We should burn with passion - having a heart for people to be saved for Jesus - completely focused on the job of sharing the Gospel with all we come across -

You see - being Gospel focused means - the main thing {JESUS}, remains the main thing!

Let's pray...