

Dear friends in our Savior,

What people in our world are most concerned about is money and many of them will do almost anything to get it. Maybe that is best evident on the many different reality shows on televisions. Take for instance the show "Fear Factor." To win \$100,000, contestants are willing to lay in box of snakes, eat grasshoppers, hang on the outside of a car that is suspended between 2 helicopters and many other wild and daring stunts. For \$250,000 and the opportunity to lose weight and become healthy, contestants on the Biggest Loser are willing to leave their jobs and families for 4-6 months, have their entire journey captured on television, and suffer through difficult and tough workouts. For \$1 million, contestants on Survivor are willing to spend 39 days out in the wild living in remote conditions where there is no shower or regular amenities of life, where they have to scrape food together, and where the back biting and betrayal presents a worse scene than the Lord of the flies. People, it seems, will do almost anything for money.

But let me ask you about something infinitely more valuable than money. What would you do to win a soul for Jesus? What types of situations are you willing to put yourself into if it means the chance to save a soul from an eternity in hell? What are you willing to sacrifice or give up if doing so meant that you had the chance to share your Savior with and provide salvation for that soul? Would it matter to you? Do you care about that and see it as a goal of your life?

Today, Paul shares with us the spirit that governed him as he went about his missionary work of proclaiming the good news about Jesus and he challenges us to imitate him as we go about our lives and work as God's missionaries to our world today. **All Things to All People.**

**I Corinthians 9:16-23** *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! <sup>17</sup> If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. <sup>18</sup> What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. <sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

The immediate context of our text finds Paul defending his apostleship to the Corinthians. Some were saying that because Paul didn't take a salary or any monetary support from the Corinthians, he wasn't really an apostle. Paul in this chapter is defending the fact that while he certainly had a right to take salary from them as a full time proclaimer of Jesus, he had chosen not to do so. For Paul, this was a personal choice. Sacrificing his salary was something Paul chose to do willingly and voluntarily to show his love for the Lord. Not receiving pay for his work gave Paul the opportunity to reflect on God's grace in a special way. It was a reminder for him of the grace of God that was revealed in Christ. Paul's reward was simply having the joy of being a servant of God and serving his people with the message of salvation.

But this topic led him to a little bit broader discussion of adiaphora in the realm of bringing God's salvation to his people. Adiaphora is a big word that we don't really hear used outside the realm of the church. Adiaphora are those things that are neither forbidden nor commanded by God. They are those things that we are free to do in our Christian liberty and freedom that God has not specifically spoken about. Paul's exercise of his Christian freedom of not receiving a salary went way beyond gaining satisfaction in ministry. He had a much higher purpose in mind: that of saving souls. That was his goal: to serve people and win souls for Christ. With that goal in mind, he was willing to give up whatever stood in the way of reaching his goal. Even though in Jesus he was perfectly free and a servant of none, he willingly submitted himself as a slave to everyone so that he might have the chance to proclaim to them the good news of Jesus. He was all things to all people. If that meant giving up his salary, he was willing to do that. If that meant participating in some of the Jewish customs to gain a hearing, then Paul was willing to do that. If that meant staying away from those customs to gain a hearing with the Greek and Roman people, then Paul was willing to do that. This is not an "end justifies the means approach." Where God had spoken, Paul certainly had no right to go against God. This approach didn't mean that it didn't matter what Paul did as long as he could talk about Jesus. It did matter that Paul followed what God said. But where God had not spoken, Paul was willing to give up his own comforts, rights, and liberties so as to win people for Christ. He tried to find common ground with people in endeavoring to win their souls eternally for Jesus. It certainly was God who created faith in the hearts of these people. But Paul was so deeply concerned about the salvation of others that he looked at this in a very personal way. Paul's higher purpose and goal in life was winning souls

for Jesus. His passion to share the gospel with others moved him to forego his rights and liberties when working among them. He was willing to be all things to all people so that by all possible means he might save some.

It leads us to some important questions: Is this our goal in life? In our evangelism and outreach, do we see it as our goal not to gain members for the church but to win souls for Jesus? Do we see that in our service to God in thanks for all that he has done for us that we are to go out and declare the praises of him who called us out of the darkness of sin and into his wonderful light? Do we have that recognition that our call to faith was also a call to go and preach the good news to all creation? Is the salvation of souls our main goal in life? It should be.

If it is our main goal, what are we willing to do to get it done? What comforts, traditions, or practices are we willing to give up so that more people can have a chance to hear the gospel? Are we willing to let go of our own agendas and take the time to really understand people where they are at and how we can best serve their spiritual needs with the life-giving word of God?

These are some difficult, penetrating questions. They hit deep down to the core of who we are and what we are about as the people of God in this world. These govern what we do individually and what we do collectively as a gathering of believers. We've seen some of this in our midst. We recently were willing to get out of our comfort zones and move to a 2 service schedule to better accommodate more people hearing God's word more often. We have gone to printing the entire service in the bulletin each week which means a little more work, but it is easier to follow along. The new friendship pads might be different to use but they help to give our names to visitors so they feel more comfortable and helps us to get contact info from the visitors so we can follow up. These might seem like little things. But these are great examples of the adaphora Paul is talking about in being all things to all people. This is the same thing with our encouragement to "sit in front, park in back." What a little thing we can do to let visitors find spots and feel comfortable so they can hear the word of God proclaimed. Perhaps some questions in front of us: are we willing to make the sacrifices with time and money to make desperately needed changes to our parking lot, signs, front bathrooms and pews? They may not seem like things that help us to preach the gospel to others, but they certainly speak to the way we care about our ministry and what God has given to us. They help to make the impression to the visitor that we care about our ministry and feel that what we have is worth something to us. For the same reasons, we need more lawn mowers and church cleaners to help take care of our facilities. These may seem like small things, but they are important both for the stewardship of God's gives and to aid us in getting the opportunity to preach the Gospel. Are we willing to get out of our comfort zones to visit people who have come to worship, VBS, or Soccer camp to welcome them and share God's word with them? Are we committed to doing whatever it takes to help get the word out about our school so more can come and we can have the opportunity to share the good news with them?

Individually, we might ask: are we able to listen and understand where another person is at in their spiritual walk to apply this good news specifically to them? This means that we are well acquainted with the way that another thinks, his viewpoints, quirks and emotional style. This means that we listen to others with infinite patience to troubles, fears and doubts; that we acknowledge backgrounds and levels of intelligence. This means that we put ourselves into their place, get on their level, learn to talk their language, feel with them and identify with them—so that we can share God's word with them. In the book, "To Kill a Mockingbird," it was Atticus Finch who said, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his viewpoint—until you climb into his skin and walk around for awhile." This is what Paul is saying—care enough about people that you get to know them deeply so you can share God's word with them. Are we willing to forego activity and behavior that might offend others so that we can share the Gospel with them? Are we willing to find common ground with every person so that we might share the good news with them.

The trouble we have in all of these questions is putting aside our pride and arrogance to be concerned about the souls of others. Too often what matters most is my comforts, my traditions, what I like best. Too often we care only about me and what I like or think is best that we don't even consider where others might be. That is sinful, selfish behavior that is born out of our sinful natures. That is not the love that God wants or demands from us, but the selfishness that brings his wrath and punishment. Yet, the glory of our Lord is that in Jesus, those sins are taken away. In Jesus, we don't fear the punishment that we deserve or tremble before God. The good news is that Jesus took our place, paid for those sins and graciously brought us into God's family. The great news is that Jesus met each one of us exactly where we were at in our lives and shared his love and forgiveness to us. He was all things to us so that we might be saved. Now we have the opportunity to be all things to all people so they might be saved! What a blessed privilege and opportunity we have in Jesus. What glory of God that he would provide salvation for souls in Jesus! It is a high purpose for us that we might use our lives to bring about this salvation in the lives of more people. What we have in Jesus is good news: our sins are forgiven and we are members of God's family. With joy in our hearts, let's ponder that question: what are we willing to do to bring this good news to more people and bring about the salvation of all souls? I pray that the answer is that in Jesus, we can be all things to all people. Amen.