

How To Win People To Christ (Part 2) – 1 Cor 9:15-27

1 Cor 9:15-27; We're in the middle of a two-part message called How To Win People To Christ; And based on Paul's example we found last week in **Part 1** . . .

That it's imperative first of all, to . . .

Remove as many obstacles as you possibly can (v12b,15,18)

Which, just like Paul, requires **6 Commitments** on your part

1. Be willing to endure anything
2. Give up your rights
3. Be straight with people
4. Don't be a burden
5. Don't be beholden to anyone

That is, make sure your obligations and relationships don't adversely influence you to say things you'd rather not, or withhold things you'd rather say

6. Offer the gospel for free

Which doesn't necessarily mean that all *pastors* should relinquish their right to be paid

But it does mean that as a *church* we should

All for the purpose of removing as many obstacles as we possibly can

Second from last week, was . . .

Do what you have to do as soon as you can (v16-17)

Whether it's out of necessity, or fear of God's discipline, or a keen sense of responsibility – do what you have to do as soon as you can . . .

In order to win people to Christ, while you can

That was Part 1; And if you missed it, I'd encourage you, as always, to watch or listen to it online, or pick up a copy at Books & Things in the lobby

- For now though (**Part 2**), Paul continues in v19 saying . . .

19 *For though I am free from all [i.e. not beholden to anyone], I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.*

Not only does he stop short of fully exercising his rights as their *leader*, he actually makes himself their *servant*

20 *To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law [referring to the OT Law] I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.*

Even though *his* standing before God wasn't dependent on keeping the Law, when he was around those who thought it was, he acted like it; he did as they did

21 *To those outside the law [referring to non-Jews, or Gentiles, who didn't adhere to the OT 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.* 22 *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. 23 *I do it all for the sake of the gospel [for the sake of the Good News of Jesus Christ being heard and embraced by more and more people] . . .*

I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings [referring to the spiritual riches of a life in Christ].

If you're going to win *more* people to Christ – you not only have to remove as many *obstacles* as you possibly can, but . . .

Identify with those around you as much as you can (v19-23)

Like Paul in v22b, you have to become *all things to all people*, that by *all means* [you] *might save some* – you might influence some for Christ

- But it requires, according to Paul's example, that you identify with those around you Including those who are *culturally different*
That's the idea of v20 – *To the Jews I became as a Jew*
When he was around Jewish people, he did as they did
He participated in their traditions, ate their food, honored their history, and probably went to their parades if they had any

The very thing our global partners do in *their* respective countries

They celebrate independence days; They observe national holidays . . .

They wear culturally appropriate clothing; And on and on

If it doesn't violate their conscience or compromise their convictions – when in Rome, they do as the Romans

They identify with those who are *culturally* different, in order to increase their chances of winning them to Christ

And we should too; Whether it's a subculture of our own, or a different *culture fr abroad*

- And then there are those who are *religiously* different

Like those in v20b, who are *under the law*

Referring to Jews who observed the 613 commandments of the OT Law, as the rule and standard for faith and life

And Paul's like – “When I'm around them, I observe them too”

Whether it's their *dietary* restrictions at meals, or their *worship* customs in the synagogue, or their works of faith like when he circumcised Timothy (Acts 16)

He identified with those who were *religiously* different as much as he could, in order to win some of them to Christ

Did that dilute or undercut his *own* standing before God? Not at all

It was spiritually neutral – of no benefit, nor detriment; B/c he's not *under* the law IOW observing some of its guidelines made no difference in his eternity, or

sanctification, or relationship with Christ

It was simply a way of opening doors for the gospel, by identifying as much as he could with its hearers

Whether they were culturally different, religiously different, or third – just plain secular

- **Winning people to** Christ sometimes requires that you identify w/ those who are *secular*
Or as Paul says in v21 – *those outside the law*
Those for whom religion of *any* sort is passé
Which at the very least includes speaking their “language”

Like missionaries in Hawaii did when they translated the NT into Hawaiian Pidgin, and called it Da Jesus Book; No kidding

I saw it in an airport several years ago, and thought it was a joke until I saw that it was done by Wycliffe Translators

So that **John 3:16** says – *God wen get so plenny love an aloha fo da peopo inside da world, dat he wen send me, his one an ony Boy, so dat everybody dat trus me no get cut off from God, but get da real kine life dat stay to da max foeva.*

It's called contextualization – they changed the *form* of the message, but not the content
Bending over backwards to speak their “language,” just like YouthHope is doing around here

Like Paul, they're identifying with those who are secular as *much* as they possibly can, with the hope of winning as *many* as they can *****

And we should too; To the extent it doesn't compromise the gospel or tarnish our witness, we should involve ourselves with secular people wherever and whenever possible
We should have them in our homes; Hang out with them at block parties
Do business with them; Eat with them; And so on
It's a critical part of being willing to endure anything (12b), in order to remove as many obstacles as you possibly can, and identify with them as **much as you can**

- Now, does that mean that you should have sex with your boyfriend in order to win *him* to Christ? I mean, that would certainly be identifying with him
Or how about throwing in a few swear words on the jobsite in order to speak the language of your co-workers? Is that okay?

Or what about serving beer and wine at your Small Group?
You know, so the unbelievers or new believers will feel more comfortable
And you'll be more attractive to them, and this whole Jesus thing won't seem quite so strange, or off the deep end

IOW **where do you draw** the line, in *identifying* with those around you?
At what point does becoming *as one outside the law*, take you *out* from under *the law of Christ* as Paul says in v21?
That is, at what point are you no longer honoring the ethic and teaching of Jesus?
At what point have you stepped *out* of the will of God, and *in* to the will of man?

To help you answer that, I have **5 Questions** to ask yourself; The first one being . . .

1. Is it sinful?

Is the thing you're doing prohibited by Scripture, and clearly wrong?
If it is, you've crossed the line in your identification with those who are secular

2. Am I conforming to the world?

The very thing Rom 12:2 says *not* to do – *Do not be conformed to this world*
If your actions and thoughts in identifying with those around you, are adversely shaping your heart and character, you've gone too far

3. Am I living above reproach?

That is, are you living in such a way that someone can't make a legitimate accusation of sin against you (1 Tim 3:2)? If so, you're well within the law of Christ
If not, you've stepped out

4. Am I avoiding all appearances of evil?

Or *every form of evil* as 1 Thess 5:22 says
Including those things that are clearly the tip of the iceberg

5. Does it cause my brother/sister to stumble?

Does it cause them to sin b/c of their own weakness or lack of conviction, like we saw a few weeks ago in 1 Cor 8
If it does, you need to stop *****

Those questions get at the heart of the *law of Christ* in v21 – his ethic, or way of living
And if you give the wrong answer to any one of them, you've crossed the line in identifying with those around you *****
Short of that however, identify with those who are secular, as **much as you can**

- As well as those who are *immature*; Immature in their faith, that is 22 – *To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak.*
Given the context of the previous chapter where Paul talks at length about not causing those who are weak or immature, to stumble in their faith . . .
I think he's referring to the same group here – those who lack understanding

That's not to say that *Paul* became immature, but that he framed his gospel presentation to match the maturity and understanding of his audience
Much like we do with age-appropriate teaching in Children's Ministry
Thereby identifying with them, in order to win them

- Culturally different, religiously different, secular, or immature . . .
If you're going to win as many people to Christ as you possibly can, you have to identify with them as *much* as you can
That's what Paul means when he says in v19 – *I have made myself a servant to all*
Put yourself in a position to *serve* them *like* Christ, so that ultimately you can *win* them to Christ

And then last . . .

Discipline yourself to work as hard as you can (v24-27)

In order to win people to Christ – remove as many obstacles as you possibly can . . .
Do what you have to do as soon as you can . . .
Identify with those around you as much as you can . . .
And discipline *yourself* to work as *hard* as you can

That's his point in v26-27 where he says – *So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control*
Literally, I pummel my body and make it a slave
IOW he makes his *body* serve his *purposes*, not the other way around

Most people make their purposes serve their body
Instead of telling their *bodies* what to do in order to accomplish their goals, they allow their bodies to *dictate* their goals

- Which to some extent is unavoidable – you can only do what your body allows

If you've had two knee replacements, a trekking ministry in the mountains of Nepal is probably not your gig
But laziness is no excuse if it is – if that *is* what you're supposed to do

Whether it's getting up early when you'd rather stay in bed; Or eating less when you want to eat more; Or exercising when you'd rather chill . . .
Or reading your Bible when you'd rather watch TV; Or getting together with others when you'd rather be alone . . .
Whatever the case, **if you're going** to fulfill God's purposes in your life and win people to Christ – laziness won't cut it
You have to discipline yourself to work as **hard as you can**

I'm *not* saying you shouldn't rest, or take care of your body, or take a Sabbath, or take a vacation
I *am* saying – instead of living *aimlessly*, live with a purpose
Instead of *pretending* to fight the good fight as one who beats the *air* – get in the ring
Instead of *succumbing* to the desires of your flesh – discipline yourself and keep them under control
Instead of running to run – run to win

- That's v24 – *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.*
IOW run to win; Play to win

I used to say that to Anna's 4th grade basketball team all the time – “Don't just play to play, play to win”
B/c discipline and practice for the sake of discipline alone, leads to drudgery
But discipline for the sake of a prize, leads to delight

And the same is true of your life in Christ
Far from a spectator sport or a leisure activity, the Christian life is an all-out effort to win the prize
An all-out effort to accomplish God's purposes **for your life**, so that by all means you might save some, and enter into the joy of his **presence with them**

- **Keep your eyes** on the prize
That's the motivation to discipline yourself and work hard – it's the prize; accomplishing your goal
Every athlete [v25] exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath [a perishable prize], but we an imperishable.

Paul most likely had in mind here the Isthmian games – a competition among the best athletes from all over the Mediterranean, held in Corinth every two years
In fact, it was second only to the Olympics in importance, and the competitors were required to undergo 10 months of rigorous training just to enter
And for what – a stinking wreath of leaves; 15 minutes of fame and a dead branch on your head

Nothing like the *unfading* crown of *glory*, we stand to receive (1 Pet 5:4)

Nothing like the crown of *righteousness* laid up for us, which the Lord will award to those *who have loved his appearing* (2 Tim 4:8)

There's no comparison

So if athletes go to such great lengths to discipline themselves in matters of *fitness*, how much more should *we* discipline ourselves in matters of *godliness*? Way more

- And not only b/c of the reward, but b/c of the risk
Lest after preaching to others [v27], you yourself should be disqualified
Disqualified from the race and disqualified from the prize – the prize of life to the full and life forever
B/c you failed to *genuinely* embrace the truths you profess – shown by your lack of focus **and discipline**

Paul's not saying here that you can lose your salvation – nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:38-39)
If the Spirit of God dwells within you, he's never leaving (Heb 13:5); You're sealed
And he's the *guarantee* of your inheritance, your eternal life, until you take possession of it when Jesus returns (Eph 1:13-14)
And God *has perfected* [past tense] *for all time those who are being sanctified* (Hb10:14)
Nor is he *so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do* (Heb 6:10); You can't lose your salvation

But **if you've never** been saved; If you're all talk/no walk; If you're all show/no go . . .
If discipline in godliness and accomplishing God's purposes is more the exception rather than the rule in your life . . .
You better stop and repent, and give yourself *fully* to the Lord and his work
Otherwise, winning others is **a moot point**

Pray – Lord, give us a passion for souls, and find us disciplined to work as hard as we can to win them to you
Identifying with those around us as much as we can . . .
And removing as many obstacles as we possibly can . . .
And doing what we have to do as soon as we can
We lift up our eyes to you and you alone; B/c u alone can rescue, and you alone can save