

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (and 10:31-11:1)

Introduction

- I. Imagine being on a journey through the woods looking for a cabin without a map
 - You need someone to come alongside you to walk with you
 - You need someone to help remove any obstacles between you and the cabin
- II. The context of this passage (ch. 8-10) involves how we use our freedom as Christians to love and serve people.

The Passage

I. The Key Verses

- A. 9:19: Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.
- B. 9:22: I have become all things to all men so that by all means possible I might save some.
- C. 10: 33: I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

II. Paul's Purpose: to save/win as many as possible

- A. To "save" people (v. 22)
 - = to save people from God's wrath and the eternal consequences (hell)
- B. To "win" people
 - = to win them to faith in Jesus Christ, forgiveness, eternal life
- C. "As many as possible" (v. 19)
 - Do we live with that kind of intentionality and purpose?

III. Paul's Posture: the role of a servant

- v. 19
 - 1. I am free and belong to no man (I am not obligated to any man)
 - 2. I make myself a slave to everyone—I serve them
 - v. 10:33: I am not seeking my own good but the good of many

IV. First servant role: becoming all things to all people (v. 22)

= removing all the unnecessary differences

A. Paul's examples (v. 20-22)

- 1. Placing himself "under the law" when he's with non-Christian Jews (20)
 - = eating kosher, observing Sabbath, wearing appropriate clothes, etc
- 2. Not placing himself "under the law" with Gentiles who don't have the law (21)
 - = eating pork, etc

B. The journey metaphor

He is coming alongside them, adapting to them, rather than forcing them to come alongside him and adapt to him

C. Examples today

Removing all unnecessary differences

Wearing similar clothes, speaking similar language, engaging in their sports, politics, music, interests, etc

D. Models for us

1. Jesus

John 1:14: Word “became” flesh and dwelt among us

Hebrews 2: He was made like us in every way

He entered into people’s real lives, broken, messy

2. Youth Leaders

Young adults who enter into the lives of junior highers

3. Moms

They become all things to their children and enter their worlds

E. Clarification: We can’t remove all differences (only “unnecessary” differences)

1. Paul does not remove his core Christian identity, values, and beliefs

a. v. 20: “though I’m not under the law”

b. v. 21: “though I am not free from God’s law but am under the law of Christ”

2. Paul does not remove or adapt his purpose (to win as many as possible)

3. We can’t remove those things either. This requires us to keep a close watch on our hearts and ask ourselves

a. “As I enter their world, Am I becoming more worldly-minded than they are becoming spiritually minded?”

b. “As I interact with them and try to become like them, is my passion for winning them growing, or is it shrinking?”

V. Second servant role: Removing all unnecessary obstacles (10:32)

= we remove all unnecessary obstacles that get in the way of them coming to faith

A. Paul’s examples

1. Example 1 (9:1-18): Paul doesn’t get paid to preach because that financial benefit may cause some people to question his motives and thus cause them to stumble and not believe the gospel

2. Example 2 (8:1-13): Paul doesn’t eat food sacrificed to idols because it might cause some “weak” Christians to do the same and eat with a bad conscience which would, thus, be causing them to stumble

B. Examples today

1. Alcohol: Don’t drink alcohol with new believers who have come out of a bad alcoholic past. Don’t cause them to stumble.

2. Tips: Tip generously to waiters/waitresses so that “cheap Christians” aren’t an obstacle to them coming to faith

3. Treat gay people with respect and care and dignity so that flippant gay jokes and dehumanizing actions aren’t an obstacle to them coming to faith.

C. Clarification: There are some obstacles we can’t remove

1. The exclusive claims of Christ (that offends our tolerant culture)

2. The cross of Christ (that points out our sin)

3. The Lordship of Christ (that requires us to give control over to him)

Conclusion

Who are the people in your life who don't know Jesus who God may be calling you to come alongside and remove all unnecessary obstacles for?

Discussion Questions

1. Opening questions: What struck you most about the sermon/the passage? What surprised you? What confused you? What did you disagree with?
2. Paul approaches his desire to "save as many as possible" with great passion and intentionality. Do you think each of us is called to that same lifestyle or is that something that is unique to Paul and other "missionaries"?
3. How should our belief in the sovereign God's choice to save certain people interact with our effort and passion to help save as many as possible?
4. How would you respond to the following comment: "Christians becoming like people in order to win them seems pretty manipulative to me. When people find out you have a particular agenda in engaging them, they get pretty turned off."
5. In your experience, what are some of the biggest "unnecessary obstacles" that get in the way of people being more open to Christ? How can we help remove those obstacles?
6. As you think about your own experiences and giftedness, what kinds of people might God be uniquely calling you to engage (rich people, poor people, business people, gay people, athletes, nerds, etc)? Or, who is a particular person in your life right now God is calling you to engage more intentionally?