

2-14-21

Sermon- Charged With Responsibility

Scripture- 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, CTW PS 147:1-11

Hymns- 20, 563, 102

Theme- Maybe you can remember receiving a puppy or another pet for Christmas as a child. The excitement of that day can never be erased from your mind. Shortly after that however, you learned that a great responsibility came along with that gift. The weight of that responsibility goes on long after the thrill of that gift. So it can be with the Gospel. In this passage, Paul tells us why, and how we have to deal with that.

I. Paul Says We Are to Become All Things to Win Some

A. Freedom is a privilege that comes with great responsibility. In Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible (**Colossians 1:16**). Humanity was created in the image of God (**Genesis 1:27**) with an amazing gift called free will.

While God has given us the right to do anything we want, including disobeying Him, He expects us to be like Jesus and do His will. Since it is God's will that none should perish (**2 Peter 3:9**), we are called to preach the Gospel message to everyone we meet.

By the power of His matchless grace, God has produced in our hearts a burning passion for the salvation of others. To reach them will not be an easy task! The diverse cultural backgrounds of our North American culture often mean that using a "canned" approach to spread the Gospel message is going to produce little or no fruit.

To reach our postmodern culture we need to be like Paul and give up our freedom to live safely inside of our own culture and become all things to all people so that we might win some to Christ.

B. We Must Surrender Freedom To Become A Slave

To be effective in evangelism for Paul meant that the salvation of others was more important than claiming, possessing and preserving his own rights. In the ancient Greek and Roman world of Paul's time the principle distinction made by law was that all human beings were **either free or slaves**. Being born a Roman citizen, Paul was not "owned" by anyone.

Paul was so interested in putting away anything that might hinder the Gospel of Christ (**1 Corinthians 9:12**), that he also chose to not take a wife or any payment for his ministry endeavors. After all, in Paul's time the more you paid a speaker the more one could boast ownership over that person.

Even though Paul went through great efforts to maintain his freedom from others owning him, he chose to become a slave to all cultures everywhere. For a person to become a slave in Paul's day meant giving up one's identity, a social death, in which the person becomes a surrogate body for the slaveholder.

For Paul this denying of self was necessary to emulate the pattern of Christ who emptied Himself (**Philippians 2:7**) and became a slave to all! Paul denied self by adapting his personal behavior and methods of preaching to three particular groups of people: the Jews under the law, those not having the law and the weak.

C. Jews Under the Law (Verse 20)

In verse 20 Paul says: "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."

Since a slave was expected to adjust to the culture of the family they served, when in the presence of the Jews Paul chose to take on their law observing patterns. Even though Paul was called as an apostle primarily to the Gentile people (**Galatians 2:8**), he made it his custom to speak at the synagogue of each town that he entered (**Acts 17:2**).

To keep from hindering the Jewish people from embracing the Gospel message, Paul chose to follow all 613 commandments of the Torah while in their presence.

While following these commands was not strenuous for he who once considered himself faultless in regards to legalistic righteousness (**Philippians 3:6**), Paul tells the church of Corinth that as a new man (**2 Corinthians 5:17**) he no longer related to God by following the law of Moses but instead through grace and faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

Though he was free from legalism (**Galatians 2:4-5**), Paul subjected himself to the scruples of the Jews when in their presence so that he might win some of them to Christ (**Romans 1:16**).

D. Those not Having the Law (Verse 21)

21 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.

Paul also accommodated himself to the Gentiles so that he might in turn win some of them to Christ. While many Jewish Rabbis such as Hillel made the law no more a burden than necessary to the Gentiles to win people for Judaism, Paul went further and did not try to bring them under the Jewish law at all!

When he was in their presence Paul did not observe the ceremonial laws of the Jews but instead was known to sit, eat and follow their traditions. Since "not having the law" usually meant "evil" or "wicked" Paul had to be careful to not give the Corinthians the impression that he was "lawless" which would imply that he practiced idolatry, sexual immorality and greed when evangelizing.

To keep from being called an advocate of libertinism (**1 Corinthians 6:12-20**), Paul says that while he is no longer under the authority of the law he still governs his evangelism efforts in accordance with the law of Christ! While becoming all things to the Gentiles often meant participating in their festivals to create rapport with them, Paul refused to mimic any of their sins.

Those Who Are Weak

22a To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

The final example that Paul gave was of himself accommodating a group of people to win them to Christ were the weak. While Paul's reference to the weak could have related to Jews and Gentiles that were in a state of unbelief, weakness as a motif in his letter often referred to those who were weak in conscience, therefore most of the Corinthian congregation (**1 Corinthians 1:26-31**).

Unlike the Jews and Gentiles of the first two groups, the weak were Christians whom Paul was trying to keep them from slipping. For example, let's look at Paul's approach to the weak in chapter eight of this letter.

How were the strong to react to weak Christians who believed eating meat offered to idols meant committing idolatry? His answer was to put up with their foolishness for a while **and when they were ready**, then with gentleness, humility and respect help enrich their theology so that they become more mature in the faith.

When Paul was near the weak of conscience he did nothing to cause them harm even though he knew full well that their self-imposed restrictions could not be validated with Scripture.

II. Preaching for the Sake of the Gospel Message

22b I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

A. The real reason that Paul chose to become all things to the Jews, Gentiles and those who were weak was to spread the Gospel message.

While Paul's overall motivation was to run the race to win the prize (**1 Corinthians 9:24**), "share in the blessings" was a reference to his desire to be a participant or partner in preaching of the Gospel.

While preaching was entrusted to Paul (**1 Corinthians 9:17**), it was not put under his control. While some would plant seed and

others water them, as a co-worker in God's kingdom Paul knew that it was God alone who makes the plant grow (**1 Corinthians 3:5-9**).

While beautiful are the feet that preach the Good News (**Romans 10:15**), the wind of the Spirit moves in mysterious ways. (**John 3:8**). Paul's heart longed for the salvation of others and as such he was willing to give up his rights and freedom to become a slave of all so that he could see some come to know Christ.

III. Preaching To The Lost Of Today's Society

A. So what does this message mean specifically for us?

The postmodern culture in which we live consists of groups of people with varied ethnic, political, socio-economic and religious backgrounds. Due to immigration of people to North America from all over the world, we can expect to meet people within our own country to have varied cultural nuances. **Because of that, we have a "Paul-type" decision to make: will we recognize and accommodate those differences in order to win them to Christ?**

For example, laughing while showing your teeth or tipping a person from Japan can be viewed as rude or insulting. Being a few minutes late to meet someone from Germany is unacceptable because it sends them the message that your time is more valuable than theirs.

Having your hands in your pockets when meeting someone from Turkey or South Korea is considered a sign of arrogance. Immediately opening a present from a person from India or China is often construed as an act of greed.

Asking for salt or pepper at a meal might offend someone from France, Italy, Spain or Japan because it sends the message that the food is terrible.

Polishing off your meal (clean plate club), meal when visiting someone from China, Philippines, Thailand or Russia sends the message that the portion of food given was inadequate and one is still hungry.

Blowing your nose while in the presence of someone from China, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia or Turkey would not only be considered rude but also repulsive.

B. To reach our postmodern, multiethnic communities the church needs to become all things to all people so that we might win some to Christ. This means change! No longer can the church remain within the confines of its own building and expect their multiethnic community to storm its doors! To reach the lost souls we need to first understand and then emulate their cultures while spreading the Good News.

This of course does not mean sharing in their sin or changing the message that God has entrusted to us but merely changing the methods of sharing the Gospel to not only show respect for but also to speak in their "cultural language."

The church needs to change from within as well. If we truly want to make our "family" hospitable to the diverse populations that we are trying to reach then our preaching, special events and preference of music styles, for example need to reflect diversity of these various cultures.

While this change might be uncomfortable to some, those in which "self" truly has died so that Christ might live within their hearts will not mind becoming "slaves" to others to reach them!

C. To be like Paul and truly become all things to all people to win some to Christ will not happen without passion. Until God changes our cold hearts into fiery furnaces of burning passion for the lost souls of this world we will forever be looking upon the prodigal sons and daughters of this world with an attitude of indifference, and fall short of God's goals for us.

Here is a good quote in that regard from Charles Haddon Spurgeon that was based on our passage for today:

"Good will conquer evil, not by the assistance of governments and the arms of potentates, not by the prestige of bishops and popes, and all their pompous array, but by hearts that burn, and souls that glow, and eyes that weep, and knees that bend in wrestling prayer. These are the artillery of God, by using such weapons as these he not only foils his foes, but triumphs over them in it,

confounding the mighty by the weak, the wise by the simple, and the things which are by the things which are not.”

Folks, as soon as God first opened your eyes so that you might see, ears so that you might hear and heart so that you might understand the Gospel message, did you not feel overwhelming joy and an intense passion to share God with others?

Or like the church of Laodicea has your heart become spiritually naked, poor and miserable because you refuse to let “self” interest die?

We as the people of God need to pray and discern what His call is for us in this unique community and then resolve to pursue it with our whole being...Amen? Let Us Pray...