

## 9:19–23 *Paul Became All Things to All People*

FOUR GRADES OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM. TILEMANN HESSHUS: True Christian freedom is that superior happiness and glory that comes from the fact that we have been freed by our Lord Jesus Christ from sin, from the wrath of God, from the curse of the law, from death, and from the tyranny of Satan; and also that we have been given the Holy Spirit, who inflames new light, righteousness, and life in us. Moreover, it restores lost men and women so that we might be able to serve God according to his Word, voluntarily and freely by his Spirit, and so that neither the law of Moses nor any human traditions as they relate to religion are able to bind our conscience before God.... Christ speaks about this spiritual freedom in [John 8](#): “If the Son has freed you, you will be free indeed.” And Paul states in [Galatians 5](#): “Stand firm, therefore, in the freedom to which Christ has called you.” And in [1 Corinthians 7](#), Paul states: “You were redeemed at a great price; do not become servants of human beings.” And [Isaiah 52](#) states: “You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without cost.” For the sake of right teaching, we lay down four grades of freedom.

The first grade is freedom from sin, from the wrath of God, from the curse of the law, from death, from the tyranny of the devil and all his hellish servants. And

instead, one receives the imputation of the righteousness of the Son of God, and reconciliation with the eternal Father. This freedom is far more precious than ruling many worlds and possessing fabulous riches. Scripture in various places speaks of this kind of liberty, such as [Romans 6](#): “You are not under law, but under grace”; and in [Romans 8](#): “The law of the Spirit of life has set me free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”

The second grade is the gift of the Holy Spirit and, through him, the renovation of the Christian man or woman, whereby the Holy Spirit imparts new life and freedom. Consequently, our nature is no longer hostile to the compulsion of the law, but rather, with a prompt and willing spirit, we acknowledge, call on, revere, and love God. Paul speaks about this grade of freedom in [Romans 8](#): “For you have not received the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry ‘Abba! Father!’” And [2 Corinthians 3](#): “Where the Spirit is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

The third grade is freedom from the legal and ceremonial laws of Moses. For after the Messiah appeared ... the whole law of Moses was abrogated and no

longer bound those born from the seed of Abraham. Paul speaks about this kind of freedom in [Colossians 2](#): “Let no one judge you in questions of food or drink, or with regard to the function of feast days or Sabbaths, which are shadows of things to come.” But the entire substance of the Law belongs to Christ, and pertains to his spiritual kingdom.

The fourth grade of freedom relates to the fact that no human traditions pertaining to religion can bind our conscience before God. Paul speaks about this grade in [Colossians 2](#): “If, therefore, you died with Christ from the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to human regulations—‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch’ (which are all things that perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?” Therefore, when the Roman pontiff tries to bind and burden the consciences of people with his distinctions regarding foods, his prohibition of marriage, his obligations regarding prayers, his works of satisfaction—these chains must be broken asunder and Christian freedom must be recalled to memory, because all things in this world are clean. EXPLICATION OF [1 CORINTHIANS 9:19](#).<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Hesshus, *Explicatio Prioris Epistolae ad Corinthios*, 137r–138v; citing [Jn 8:36](#); [Gal 5:1](#); [1 Cor 7:23](#); [Is 52:3](#); [Rom 6:14](#); [8:2](#), [15](#); [2 Cor 3:17–18](#); [Col 2:16](#), [20](#).

PAUL’S MISSIONARY STRATEGY. PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI: To win someone to Christ means to make someone one’s own property—and this occurs by faith, which comes from hearing. And people do not listen freely to someone unless they judge them to be their friend and concerned for their well-being. This was happening here, because Paul was making every effort to win the approval of the Corinthians. He became all things to all people—as far as ceremonies and neutral things were concerned. But in matters that were clearly prohibited by the Word of God, Paul did not seek to gratify people. As far as the Jews were concerned, he allowed Timothy to be circumcised; he shaved his head when he was at Cenchreae; he fulfilled his vow in Jerusalem. As for the Gentiles, he did not allow Titus to be circumcised and he opposed Peter to his face. Paul kept the law when he was with Jews, but not for the same reason, for they were insisting that it was required for them, while Paul obeyed it voluntarily and out of love for the salvation of others. Paul was eager to be considerate of those listeners who would have been immediately alienated from him if he had completely overturned the law and ceremonies in an instant. In the meantime, even as he was accommodating himself to their weaknesses, he was teaching them the primary doctrines of religion, bringing sin to their attention, and preaching to them of their

need for righteousness, which external ceremonies cannot supply; and from this he concluded that righteousness must be sought from Christ alone. With these strategies, then, Paul was winning them. COMMENTARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 9:19](#).<sup>54</sup>

**PREACHING MUST BE ACCOMMODATED TO THE HEARER.** WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: With these words Paul gives a clear signal that the faithful minister of Christ must not simply preach and win over people by preaching the Word, but he must do it with exceptional zeal so as to accommodate his teaching to the understanding of his hearers. Those who would otherwise not be won over by preaching, he will win over by accommodating himself to them and tempting them. He will in no way be content to have won over some people, unless he acquires more people than usual. This passion to win over many people should never be absent from a minister of Christ. COMMENTARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 9:19](#).<sup>55</sup>

**WINNING THE LOST.** JOHN TRAPP: The Greek word for “gain” signifies among other things the joy and delight of the heart in gaining. It also signifies craft and guile, as is the case with the fox that, when he is very hungry after prey and

can find none, lies down and pretends that he is a dead carcass. Thus when the birds light on him, he catches them. In the same way ministers must deny themselves to gain their hearers. COMMENTARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 9:19](#).<sup>56</sup>

**PAUL ACCOMMODATED HIS FREEDOM TO JEWS AND GENTILES.** JOHN CALVIN: To this point, Paul has used one particular example to demonstrate how diligently he had accommodated himself to the weak. Now, he adds a general statement, and then enumerates several examples. The general statement is this: that although he is under the authority of no one, nevertheless he has lived as if he were subject to the will of everyone, and has voluntarily subjected himself to the weak, to whom he was not bound in any way. And the particular examples are these, that among the Gentiles he was like a Gentile, and among the Jews he behaved as if he were a Jew. In other words, although he diligently followed Jewish ceremonies when he was among the Jews, he was very careful to avoid offending the Gentiles in his observance of them.... “To become all things” means to adopt every sort of appearance as the situation requires, or to assume different roles for the sake of peoples’ differences. When Paul says that he became as one “outside the law” and “under the law,” this should be under-

<sup>54</sup> Vermigli, *In Selectissimam S. Pauli Priorem ad Corinth ... Commentarii*, 224r; citing [Acts 18:18](#).

<sup>55</sup> Musculus, *Comm. 1 Cor.*, 293–94.

<sup>56</sup> Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition*, 681\*.

stood to refer only to the ceremonial part of the law. For the moral part of the law applies to all in common, the Gentiles as well as the Jews; and Paul would not have been allowed to gratify humans to that extent. For this teaching was valid only for neutral things, as was said before. COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS 9:19–21.<sup>57</sup>

**CEREMONIAL AND MORAL LAW.** DAVID DICKSON: In conforming himself to the Gentiles, who did not practice the Jewish law, Paul laid aside the use of those ceremonies as if he were without the law. In the meantime, he intimates that he did not mean the moral law, or the law of love, which is the perpetual law of God and Christ; from this he could not be freed. But Paul did free himself from the ceremonial law so that, for the sake of the gospel, he might choose whether to practice various ceremonies. EXPOSITION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 9:21.<sup>58</sup>

**MINISTERS MUST DILIGENTLY SEEK LOST PEOPLE.** MARTIN BUCER: The faithful ministers of Christ are not to give up lightly on anyone, as long as people are still people and God's creatures and have not shown themselves to be dogs by raging all the more against those who call them to the kingdom of heaven, the more faithfully such people want to assist them to find salvation; or in that the more attrac-

tively and gloriously the pearl of the holy gospel is presented to them, the more they despise it and trample it under foot. This is why the second point, the faithfulness, seriousness, and diligence with which the Lord desires his lambs to be sought, must be thoroughly taken to heart and faithfully considered. He desires that they should be sought wherever they are scattered, and sought with such seriousness and diligence that one should be ready to be all things to all people, as dear Paul was, and even to hazard one's own life, as the Lord himself did, so that the lost lambs might be found and won. TRUE CARE OF SOULS.<sup>59</sup>

**MINISTERS MUST MASTER THEIR PEOPLE'S AFFECTIONS.** JOHN TRAPP: St. Paul harps much on this string, out of a strong desire of winning souls to God. Ministers must turn themselves into all shapes and fashions both of spirit and speech to gain souls to God. Christ used every means of wisdom (said Clement of Alexandria) so as to convert some. Ministers should labor to be masters of their people's affections. COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS 9:21.<sup>60</sup>

**BEING ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE.** WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: "I have become all things to all people." Whereas Paul begins by speaking about specifics, in the end he

<sup>57</sup>CO 49:447 (cf. CTS 39:304–5).

<sup>58</sup>Dickson, *Exposition of St. Paul's Epistles*, 55\*.

<sup>59</sup>Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, 78.

<sup>60</sup>Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition*, 681\*.

concludes with a summary. It is as if he were saying: “What more? I have accommodated myself to all people. I have become all things to all people. I serve all people. I condemn no one. I wish my message to go forth in every way possible.” Now the apostle should not be understood to be saying that he has accommodated himself to people outside the boundaries of the law of Christ, for then he would not be an apostle of Christ but an apostle of flatterers, and he would not be saving them but destroying them....

Who would not say that the apostle was the most inconsistent and changeable man (like Vertumnus, the god of changing seasons), turning himself into all different shapes, unless one considers Paul’s goal? He was doing this, not so as to change his purpose, but so that he might turn people away from their error and win them to the knowledge of Christ. Consequently we must be cautious when judging ministers of Christ, lest we too easily call them two-faced when we see them following the example of Paul by being all things to all people. COMMENTARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 9:22](#).<sup>61</sup>

**PAUL WINS CONVERTS THROUGH AFFECTION, NOT DISSIMULATION.** THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: [Paul is saying that] in

matters that are indifferent—things that may either be done or not done with a good conscience—I have changed myself in all fashions so as to comport with all, that I might win some of various kinds of people. St. Augustine, in his book *To Consentius: Against Lying*, illustrates this text very well: “The Apostle says, ‘I have become everything to everyone’ ... not by deceit of dissimulation, but by the affection of compassion; for persons become like those whose infirmities they condescend to when they support and relieve someone else with the mercy they themselves would desire if they were in the same situation.” ANNOTATIONS ON [1 CORINTHIANS 9:22](#).<sup>62</sup>

**THAT I MIGHT SAVE SOME.** JOHN TRAPP: This is the highest honor in the world, to have a hand in the saving of souls. Let us exercise our every ability toward this end. And if someone does not have fine wheat bread, then let them give barley bread to the poor, or whatsoever the Lord has committed to them. COMMENTARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 9:22](#).<sup>63</sup>

**PARTICIPANTS IN THE GOSPEL.** PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI: Persons who share in [the blessings of] the gospel are those who cooperate in the salvation of those who hear. For the gospel is the power of God

<sup>61</sup> Musculus, *Comm. 1 Cor.*, 296. Vertumnus was an Etruscan god, a statue of whom stood in Rome.

<sup>62</sup> Downname, *English Annotations*, DD4v\*. Augustine’s statement is found in [NPNF 3:493](#).

<sup>63</sup> Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition*, 681\*.

for salvation. They are the instruments through which God declares his power for delivering men and women. That is why people who overlook nothing that they think might serve the salvation of their neighbor are rightly called “participants” of the gospel. COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS 9:23.<sup>64</sup>

**PREACHERS MUST HEED THEIR OWN MESSAGE OF SALVATION.** JOHN TRAPP: “That I may be saved together with you.” For the bell may call men and women to church, though it never enters the church itself. The field may be well-sowed with a dirty hand. The well may yield excellent water, though it contains much mud. The builders of Noah’s ark drowned. And the sign that tells the passenger that there is wholesome food or warm lodging within may itself remain in the storms without.... Oh how many heavenly doctrines are in some people’s ears that were never in the preacher’s heart! So true is that statement of Hilary, “The ears of the people are more holy than the hearts of the priests.” COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS 9:23.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Vermigli, *In Selectissimam S. Pauli Priorem ad Corinth ... Commentarii*, 225r–v.

<sup>65</sup> Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition*, 681\*.