

Christians Gone Wild!
1st Corinthians, week 21
Missional Ministry (1 Corinthians 9:19–27)
June 11, 2006
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I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.
1 Corinthians 9:22b

In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, Paul provides one of the most succinct summaries of the gospel (the good news about Jesus) in all of Scripture: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . . he was buried . . . he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” He also speaks of our need to contend for its accuracy and contextualize for its availability, while being continually changed by its transforming power.

Contending for the Gospel

Paul spent the opening two chapters of 1 Corinthians contending for the gospel because people had become confused and compromised regarding the truth of Jesus. Throughout the remainder of the letter he continues to contend for the gospel. Subsequently, we must embrace the fact that the gospel is continually under attack from false teaching and needs to be contended for by God’s people with gracious critiques of error and presentations of truth in both word and deed. Once the gospel is contended for it can then be contextualized so as many people as possible can understand it.

Contextualizing the Gospel

¹⁹Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰To 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. ²¹To 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. ²²To 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. ²³I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Since every Christian is in some sense a missionary bringing the love of Jesus into a culture, the example of Paul in this section of Scripture is incredibly significant. Paul simply states that while the truthfulness of the gospel is unchanging, the methods by which it is communicated must be constantly changing. In other words, it must be contextualized to fit varying cultures (sadly, some Christians find such a thing to be compromise when it is in fact biblical).

For example, the four gospels that tell us about Jesus are each written to communicate most effectively to various cultural groups, Matthew for Jews, Mark for Romans, Luke for Gentiles, and John for Greeks. Like Paul, we must be willing to enter into culture in such a way as to identify with various people groups so that we can most effectively share the love of Jesus with them. If Paul were writing

today he may have spoken of his desire to relate to indie rockers, hip-hoppers, suburban families, and blogging techophiles.

One word of caution, however, is that not every aspect of culture is compatible with Christian living. Therefore, like Jesus and Paul who both entered into relationships with people from varying cultures without participating in sin, we must learn to evaluate aspects of a culture by three categories:

1. **Reject**— Some aspects of a culture are simply sinful and should be rejected by God's people. In our day this would include sexual sins (fornication, pornography, homosexuality, adultery), illegal drug use, and the pluralistic notion that every religion is an equally valid path to salvation.
2. **Receive**— Some aspects of a culture are the result of common grace and should be received by God's people. Examples in our day would include stewarding and enjoying creation, hungering for meaningful relationships in community, and participating in community-service organizations such as food banks, hospices, and foster care that seek to serve those in need.
3. **Redeem**— Some aspects of a culture are, in and of themselves, morally neutral but are used for evil; they can be redeemed for good. Examples in our day include using media portals (e.g., internet, podcast, vodcast) for the gospel, and having sex, spending money, and using power in such a way that honors Jesus and demonstrates His love for people.

Changed by the Gospel

²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Lastly, the contending and contextualizing work of the gospel is only possible by those who have been changed by the gospel so that they hate sin, love Jesus, love people, and continually experience transformation by the power of God the Holy Spirit. Those who are continually changed by the gospel learn to live their life with the self-discipline of an athlete, continually seeking to run the race God has laid out for their life with greater holiness. As a result, they are capable of enjoying food, friends, and fun as gifts from God to be used in a redeemed way while rejecting sins such as gluttony, drunkenness, and perversion. They can be good missionaries embedded in culture with kingdom loyalties.

Verses for next week: 1 Corinthians 10:1–13