

# All Means All

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*(1 Corinthians 9: 16-23)*

For the Apostle Paul, there is nothing more important than proclaiming the gospel. Paul understands that he has been commissioned to share the gospel of Christ, this good news that has guided him in helping to start churches throughout the Roman Empire, including the one to which he is writing to here, the church in Corinth. This commission has led Paul to understand that he must become all things to all people. He claims he is a slave to all, bound to all people because of his charge.

As Paul writes, he has become a Jew to the Jews, one under the law to those under the law, outside the law to those outside the law, weak to the weak. In his own words he says, “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.” For Paul, there is nothing more important than sharing the gospel with as many people as possible, regardless of the cost – to himself or, in my opinion, to the gospel.

You see I struggle with Paul's commitment to become "all things to all people". The reason for that is I don't believe that does justice to the gospel that Paul is trying to share. Where in the Gospels does it say that Jesus became rich for the rich, or a Roman to the Romans, or a Pharisee to the Pharisees? Jesus was simply Jesus, sharing love and hope to everyone his path crossed. Jesus didn't become all things to all people because that isn't what the Gospel is about. The Gospel is about loving people as you are, sharing grace because of who they are, and finding that place where we can each be ourselves and still love one another – with hope, grace, and mercy. Paul twists that idea a bit, suggesting that by becoming all things to all people, he can better share the gospel, and win more people to Jesus. I think he misses the point by doing this, and in turn misses opportunities to share the gospel for what it is. But I think that Paul is on to something with his idea of becoming all things to all people. Maybe instead of being all things to all people, Paul simply needs to share the gospel with all people, because to follow the gospel, to bring people into the love of God in Christ, we don't need

to become like them, rather we need to be like Christ to them. And when we say all people, that means all people, because all means all.

It means that we share the gospel with the saints and the sinners. It means we share the gospel with those like us and those who are not like us at all. It means that we welcome into the love of God everyone with whom our paths cross – those who are rich and those who are poor, those who are white and those who are colored, those who follow Jesus and those who don't, those who are straight and those who are gay, those who follow one political party and those who follow the others. That simple three letter word holds significant power. It means that everyone has value, everyone has worth, everyone belongs to the gospel and the gospel belongs to everyone. Take a moment, if you would and look at the cover art of your bulletin. What you will see there is the St. Andrew's Chalice, the symbol of the CC(DOC). But what you will also see are words written through the Chalice – words like; retired, left-handed, queer, unemployed, ambidextrous, divorced, doubter, transgender,

female, male, straight, rich, poor, and a host of others. This picture was part of a T-shirt sold at one of the General Assemblies to remind us that as Disciples of Christ that we believe that all means all. That those listed on the chalice and those who aren't are welcome at the Table, that they belong to the Gospel, that they have a place in the body of Christ. This is the message of the gospel, that all people being all things are all welcome into the love of God in Christ. No one is excluded, no one is cast aside or cast out. And so, while Paul tries to become all things to all people, he misses the opportunity to be authentic in his love for Jesus and his passion for the gospel.

Maybe that is the most important thing for us to remember, that to "win" people to the gospel, we must be authentic in our love for Jesus and in our passion for the gospel. When we share the gospel, when we share the love and grace of God, if we do so from our heart, with our own passion and love then we are more likely to allow others the opportunity to see God in us and through us. We must live it as much as we must say it. Our actions

speak so much louder than our words. When we live the gospel, by living as authentic followers of Christ, we bring so many more people into the love of God.

Paul had it partially right. We need to share the gospel with all people, just not by become all things to all people. But rather by being ourselves, by loving all people as Jesus loved all people, and by authentically living out our call to share God's love with the world. This is the mission of the church, the call to each and every disciple. And when we do so with passion, grace, hope and love we open the door for God to pass through into the lives of those we meet. Everyone is welcome at the Feast of God. Everyone belongs. Welcome them in by being Jesus to them. Amen.