

The Chameleon Christian

Often times, if we look closely at a passage in the Bible, we notice things not just about the material, but the author himself. Scripture comes alive as we see the context surrounding the word, and the reasons that these words were written to these specific people. One such example of this is in the first letter to the Corinthians, chapter nine. In this, Paul is defending his freedoms as a Christian to those who would seek to hold him to a different standard than others. Paul adamantly endorses his right to take a wife, eat meat, accept support from congregations, and other such allowances that he is free to do. He turns the heat on the Corinthians, however, by saying that he denies himself these things for the sake of others. He brings to attention that he has made himself a slave of Christ, obligated to spread the Word to all men, even if it means going against his own desires and comfort. He caps this thought off by his statement in verse 22: "... *I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*"

Those that have had any interaction with humans over the course of their lives know and understand one simple fact: you cannot please everyone. People spread their lives thin by trying to put on different faces and appeal to everyone else's personal tastes and preferences. Yet, this is, in a sense, what Paul is endorsing with verses 19-23 of 1 Corinthians 9. He has bent over backwards to appeal to every different sort of audience he can. Paul lists four different groups of people that he has changed to in order to "win them." It is a very interesting choice of words, but yet one that speaks a sermon in itself to us as Christians today.

One might ask, "Why would Paul go to such great lengths to appeal to people? If the Gospel is living and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12), then would not the words themselves be enough?" In a perfect world, this would be precisely the case. If we lived in a society where there was no bias or premeditated feelings towards Christ and His church, then all we would have to do would be to preach the Word and that would be enough. Unfortunately, we do not live in a world that looks past the messenger to see the message for what it truly is, and shoves it off without a sincere and honest look. Paul understood this, and we would do well to understand it too.

Notice very briefly that what is not an option for us is changing the message to fit people's needs. We have no authority to alter doctrine to appeal to the whims of the masses (Revelation 22:18-19), nor do we have any right to withhold the whole counsel of God from anyone. What Paul is addressing in this passage is simply the medium whereby that message would be

delivered. For instance, if one were standing in front of a group of people about to deliver a persuasive speech to entice the audience to buy chunky-monkey ice cream, and also knew ahead of time that they had a bitter feeling towards people who wore orange ties, common sense would tell that person to leave the orange tie in the closet. Perhaps go with a blue or nice shade of green, as these would take the attention off the tie and onto the reason for being in front of the group of people in the first place. When Paul says, "*To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak,*" he is simply saying that he put on the appearance of being weak so that the listener would not be worried so much with who Paul was, as much as about what Paul was saying.

As Christians, we have to be aware of our audience. When we talk to the person sitting next to us in class, what words will set them off? What key phrases are going to make them tune you out, and ultimately tune out Christ? Understanding your audience is the key to any kind of persuasive speech, and what better persuading can we do than to convince people to turn to God? Let us strive to be more personable and knowledgeable presenters of the word. Let us be the one to change colors to blend into a situation to teach someone the Truth.

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