

Gathering His People

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 9:19-23

More will be said later, from this passage, about partaking of the work of the gospel and fruitful labors. But it should first be made clear, at this point, that it is one thing to meet people who are already a part of the family of God, and to be involved with them and to love them. It is another thing to actively pursue the gathering in of God's people from all walks of life. It could be tempting to only recruit the people with whom you already like and feel comfortable. We need to be ready for the surprises and delights of discovering what Christ will do with people who, according to us, are unlikely, unlovely, and undesirable. God may be challenging us to operate outside of our tastes, preferences, and comfort zone! By the way, this can also bring surprises that are not delightful. Disappointments and frustrated efforts are also a part of the bargain, when reaching out with the gospel. See II Corinthians 12:15 cp. II Corinthians 4:5-18; 6:1-10.

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– A four-part series on II Corinthians 6:11-13. (September-October 2021)

I Corinthians 9:19-23 – E Pluribus Unum = "*Out of many one*"

The above statement (given in Latin and English) is a great ideal / a great motto for the United States of America, but it is also a great statement for the kingdom of Christ and the family of God. Paul dedicated himself to the work of going to all kinds of people and presenting the gospel to them. The goal was to unite them with the Triune God and with all other true believers in Christ (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:16, 22, 28-29; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 15:1-21; Ephesians 2:11-22; 6:18, 23-24; I Timothy 2:1-6; II Timothy 2:10; I John 1:1 – 2:2; Revelation 5:8-10 cp. Acts 9:10-16; 22:12-15; 26:19-22).

I Corinthians 9:19 – Though Paul was first the servant of God / the servant of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10), yet he adopted the attitude of a servant who was sent to benefit men (I Corinthians 10:23-33; Ephesians 5:1-2 cp. Mark 10:42-45). [Book: "Slave" – J. MacArthur – Thomas Nelson]

I Corinthians 9:20 – Though Paul was sent to the Gentiles (II Timothy 1:11; Acts 26:13-17), he also made sure to relate the gospel to his Jewish brethren (Acts 26:17-21; 9:17-20; 13:38-46; 17:1-2, 10; Romans 1:16; 9:1-5; 10:1-4).

I Corinthians 9:21 – Paul's main calling was to reach those who did not have the background of the Old Testament Law. Such people were pagans / heathens (worshippers of a god, or gods, idolaters, philosophers, etc., and also those who were just godless, materialistic, unspiritual people). See Acts 9:1-16; 22:1-21; 26:1-23; Ephesians 3:1-9; 4:17-19. Also, see Galatians 2:1-21; Acts 14:19 – 15:29 for some examples of how the Jewish / non-Jewish ministries interacted.

If you study Paul's sermons, you will see a distinct difference between how he spoke to Jewish people and how he spoke to non-Jewish people. With Jewish people, Paul did not have to introduce who the true God was. He did not have to establish the basic moral code of God, found in the law. Paul would go straight to the history of Israel and the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies and reveal Israel's failure to recognize and honor their Messiah. Gospel promises and gospel warnings were then taught. See Acts **13:16-41**; 17:1-3; 26:19-20; Romans 1:16-18.

When talking to non-Jewish people, Paul had to establish the nature of the one-and-only true God. He also had to establish God's condemnation of sin. Then he could explain the sin problem and how it was to be reconciled by Christ's death and resurrection. Gospel promises and gospel warnings were then taught. See Acts 13: 42-52; 14:11-18; **17:18-31**; 24:25; Romans 1:16-18.

I Corinthians 9:21 – *“Not under the law” is not the same as “lawlessness”* (I John 3:4 cp. I John 3:4-10 – RE: People who “sin / commit sin,” as a regular practice that they are allowing or tolerating). **It is a matter of covenants, dispensations, and the difference of doing things in the power of the flesh or in the power of the Spirit** (Romans 6:14; 8:1-4; Galatians 5:16-18). Romans, chapters six and eight, deal with our position / status in the flesh or in the Spirit. They also describe the battle of overcoming fleshly thinking and behavior through the work of the Spirit (Romans 6:6-14; 8:1-14). There are two positions that we may have before God. *“In the flesh”* is our status with God as unsaved natural men. *“In the Spirit”* is our status with God as saved / born-again men, in Christ (John 3:6-7 cp. **Romans 8:9**; I Corinthians 2:11-16; 15:22). There are some who teach that there are three kinds of people: non-Christians, spiritual Christians, and carnal Christians. In reality, there are only two kinds of people: unsaved or saved / goats or sheep / tares or wheat.

Consider Galatians 3:1-3; 5:1, 13-18, 19-26, which describe the possible inconsistent behavior of Christians. Though their position is “In the Spirit,” their state of thinking and behavior might, for a season, be carnal / fleshly. This is not to be tolerated as a permanent condition of those who are born again (I Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:8 – 6:3, 7-12; 10:35-39 cp. Romans 8:1-14; Galatians 5:16-18).

See the booklet, “What Should We Think of the Carnal Christian?” by Ernest C. Reisinger, Banner of Truth – Publisher.

I Corinthians 9:22-23 – Many forms of weakness in people require us to have faith, grace, patience, and gentleness to reach them with the Gospel, which is God's power to save / deliver / bring men to repentance and create faith. **Paul's great desire was to share / to be a partaker of the gospel blessings with other believers / other followers of Christ.** These blessings come when we are used of God to gather His people and bring them to saving faith.

See I Corinthians 10:31-33; II Timothy 2:1, 8-10, 14-16, 22-26; Titus 3:2-9; James 1:18-20; Romans 1:13-17; 3:9-26; 10:8-17; Philippians 1:12-18.