

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

INTRODUCTION:

1. "Accommodating," "adaptable," "pliant." "Fit in with the wishes or needs of ... able to adjust to new conditions ... pliable ... easily bent, flexible" (*New Oxford American Dictionary*).
2. I don't know about you, but at first hearing, to me at least, these words suggest weakness.
3. If we are accommodating, adaptable, pliant because we have no backbone, because we'd rather go along than stand for the truth, then yes, we are weak. Galatians 2:11-13.
4. But, if we are accommodating, adaptable, pliant because we want to serve the truth in the most effective way possible, then no, we are not weak. In fact, we are quite the opposite. We are strong, very, very strong. Standing for the truth in the most effective way possible requires a measure of self-denial that only great strength can supply.
5. "In great natures we ... meet with a remarkable combination of firmness and yielding. To do a great work in this world, a man needs a powerful will, a resolution not easily moved, at the same time that he displays a flexibility of disposition, and a readiness to adapt himself to different characters and to changing circumstances. Without the determination which approaches obstinacy, he will not keep the one aim before him; without the pliancy needed in dealing with men, he will not be able to secure the aim" (J. R. Thomson, *Pulpit Commentary*).
6. In Jesus and His servant Paul we find great natures both firm and yielding and they insist that we become just like them, strong enough to bend.
7. In this morning's sermon, let's study 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and make four applications to our lives.

ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT:

1. **I am free from all men.** Galatians 1:10.
2. **For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.**
 - A. Paul did not make himself a slave to the *will* of men, but to the *salvation* of men's souls.
 - B. Paul's attitude was this. It's not about me. It's not about what I want to preach, it's about what *Jesus wants* me to preach. It's not about how I want to preach, it's about how *people need* me to preach so they'll be most inclined to believe and obey.
 - C. 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1.
 - D. "It is not a wish to please men, but a desire to remove every hindrance to the reception of the gospel. With this end in view, we shall not find it difficult to become 'all things to all men.' A human soul is not too dearly won at the cost of a little self-sacrifice. In this aspect the rule we are considering is but a faint copy of the great accommodation—in incarnation and work of Jesus Christ (H. Bremner, *Pulpit Commentary*).
3. **To ...**
 - A. **The Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews.** Acts 16:1-3. But, compare Galatians 2:3-5. "Paul was most compliant in things indifferent, but most unyielding in things essential. When he yielded he not only confined himself to things indifferent, but made it to be understood that the things were indifferent. When they were regarded as essential he refused to comply. This is strikingly illustrated in his permitting the circumcision of Timothy, but resisting that of Titus" (E. Hurndall, *Pulpit Commentary*).
 - B. **Those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law.** The contrast is between cultural vs. religious Jews, or perhaps God-fearing Gentiles vs. Godless Gentiles. Acts 17:17A.
 - C. **Those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.** Acts 17:17B-31.
 - D. **The weak I became weak, that I might win the weak.** 1 Corinthians 8:13; 9:18.
4. **I have become all things to all men ...**
 - A. **So that I may by all means save some.** "Whatever he might lose, it was his hope and purpose to 'win souls'—a rich recompense and an abundant compensation for all his losses" (J. R. Thomson, *Pulpit Commentary*).
 - B. **I do all things for the sake of the gospel.** 1 Corinthians 9:18; 2 Corinthians 11:7-12.
 - C. **So that I may become a fellow partaker of it.** 1 Corinthians 9:26-27; Acts 20:33-35.

APPLICATIONS:

1. We must do what is lawful **AND** effective.

- A. The latter is always the former but the former is not always the latter. 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23-24.
- B. "If we would make others like ourselves in things essential, we must first make ourselves like them in things indifferent" (E. Hurndall, *Pulpit Commentary*).
- C. Lectures academician illustration; some religious debates illustration. 2 Corinthians 6:3-10.

2. We must be strong enough to bend in all aspects of life. Evangelism, edification, marriage, children, work, friendship, politics, etc.

3. We must use several keys to unlock effectiveness.

A. Service.

- 1) We often assume that other people think like we do, and if we realize they don't, we say, in effect, "Tough, you should" and go ahead do exactly what we want even though it's far from the most effective thing we could have done.
- 2) To be effective, we must be servants. It must not be about us, but about God and other people.
- 3) Paul "became 'all things to all men' in order to realize his supreme object. Personal predilections must be sacrificed, and unpleasant restraints submitted to, if we would do effectively the greatest work under heaven. An unbending preacher will preach to unbroken hearts. An insistence upon our rights and privileges is a short method, often adopted, of ruining all hopes ... *We often bar and bolt the very door that we are trying to unfasten*" (E. Hurndall, *Pulpit Commentary*).

B. Knowledge. "All that he means, I think, by the words is that he endeavored to put himself into the place, or rather into the views and feelings, of those whom he endeavored to win to Christ. He transmigrated himself, so to speak, went into their souls, clothed himself with their feelings, and argued from their standpoint. Now, this way of influencing men is both right and wise. As a debater, whether in politics, philosophy, or religion, he only acts fairly and with power who endeavors to put himself in the very position of his opponent, to look at the points in dispute from the opponent's standpoint, with the opponent's eyes, and through the opponent's passions. Such a man becomes mighty in debate. This is what Paul did. He made 'himself all things to all men'" (D. Thomas, *Pulpit Commentary*).

C. Love.

- 1) 2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:3-8.
- 2) The preacher who hid himself after worship illustration.
- 3) Romans 14:1, 3A, 13; 15:1-3A.
- 4) "Nothing but the constraining love of Christ can invest man either with the disposition or the power for such a work—a work requiring self-sacrifice, patience, tenderness, invincible determination, and hallowed devotion. This is what gave Paul the power to be 'made all things to all men.' 'I please all men in all things,' he says, 'not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved'" (D. Thomas, *Pulpit Commentary*).

D. Effort. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

E. Faith.

- 1) "The wrath to come,' 'the perdition of ungodly men,' was to ... Paul no dream, but an awful reality. It was worth all possible effort and self-sacrifice to save men from it. If he had no other impulse than that of mere human sympathy to move him, we have here a sufficient explanation of the enthusiasm of his zeal. It is often said that if Christian people really believed the future that is before multitudes of their fellow-creatures to be so dark and dreadful as they say it is, they could never rest as they do in their own natural or spiritual satisfactions. They would rather be beside themselves with a frantic agony of sympathetic sorrow and desire to save. There is truth in this. The easy indifference with which too many of us regard the condition and prospects of the godless world around us, belies the reality of our faith" (J. Waite, *Pulpit Commentary*).
- 2) The drowning person illustration. It's not about how we think it ought to work, it's about what will work.

4. We must all make ourselves slaves to all. No one person can supply all things all people need. We are limited by ability and time. Therefore, we must all do all we can to take up the lack. Colossians 1:24; 1 Corinthians 16:17; Ephesians 4:11-16.

CONCLUSION: Matthew 17:24-27; 1 Corinthians 11:1.