

## 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

**Pastor:** 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: It is only necessary to keep the Old Testament law to convert Jews to Christ.

**“For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to 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; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Messiah, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”**

**9:19** Regardless of how one approaches the details which follow in 1 Corinthians 9:20-23, that a figure like the Apostle Paul considers himself to be free from the constraints that others would, or might, place upon him, is clear enough from his statement, “For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them” (1 Corinthians 9:19, ESV).<sup>1</sup> The verb *douloō* (δουλόω) means, “**to make one subservient to one’s interests, cause to be like a slave**” (BDAG).<sup>2</sup> The statement of 1 Corinthians 9:19 bears some strong similarity to Yeshua’s own word, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45; cf. Luke 22:27). Yeshua is the One who left His exalted glory in Heaven, to take on the form of a servant or slave, and be horribly executed for human sin (Philippians 2:5-8). A figure like Paul, in emulation of his Lord, definitely frees himself from any unnecessary constraints that wider society might place upon him—be that society Jewish or Greco-Roman—so that the interests of the good news might be maximized. Paul is witnessed to have deprived himself of some things which the other Apostles did not, so he could influence the most amount of people with the good news of the Messiah.

**9:20-23** Messianic people do not frequently tend to have an easy time with approaching the statements issued by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:20-23, not just because there can be some poor English translations of various clauses (discussed further), but because of how Paul’s statements tend to be applied. It is often perceived that Paul is not too positive to a continued validity of the Torah or Moses’ Teaching in the post-resurrection era, and that any observance of the Law of Moses by Paul, was only for the purposes of Jewish evangelism. As we will see, however, using the text as our guide, this is hardly the only way that Paul’s statements can be viewed.

1 Corinthians commentators across the board, whose position on the validity of the Torah in the post-resurrection era tends to be more negative than positive, rightly recognize that the main thrust of 1 Corinthians 9:20-23 is Paul’s self-identification with a variety of audiences who will encounter his selfless ministry service for the Lord Yeshua. In the view of Richard B. Hays, “Paul represents himself as a conciliator, seeking to overcome some cultural and ethnic divisions in order to bring people of all sorts into the one community of faith.”<sup>3</sup> J. Paul Sampley further concludes, “As Paul depicts his evangelistic efforts, his voluntary slavery to all *involves a fundamental and exemplary accommodation to people as and where he finds them.*”<sup>4</sup>

All readers of 1 Corinthians 9:20-23 should recognize how there is a need to approach diverse people groups, who need to encounter the good news or gospel, in any manner of different ways. The sphere of influence one person has, is not the same sphere of influence of another. Noting how Paul makes himself a slave or servant to everyone (1 Corinthians 9:19), should necessarily point us in the direction of the

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<sup>1</sup> This entry has been adapted from the commentary *1 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>2</sup> BDAG, 260.

<sup>3</sup> Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 153.

<sup>4</sup> Sampley, in *NIB*, 10:907.

categories he lists in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 as being *ad hoc*, and hardly the only groups of people that Paul would encounter in his ministry service.

The main controversy which contemporary Messianics encounter here, involves Paul's assertion "To the Jews I became as a Jew." This has been taken at times to imply that the Apostle Paul seldom, if ever, considered himself a Jew or Jewish—much less a person who was supposed, expected, or likely to observe the Torah or Law of Moses. While Paul's identity in Yeshua, and what He has accomplished, does indeed transcend his ethnic heritage, religious upbringing, and ancestral traditions—did Paul really stop considering himself Jewish? A blunted approach that we encounter is seen in the thoughts of Ben Witherington III, who concludes, "In this chapter we learn a good deal about Paul's real view of where he stands vis-à-vis Jewish and Gentile Christians. It becomes clear that in various ways, while still manifesting various aspects of his Jewish heritage, Paul has distanced himself from some of its most fundamental aspects."<sup>5</sup> From this angle, Paul considered himself Jewish, but he did not have to follow the Torah in order to do so. Things like the Sabbath, appointed times, and kosher eating were definitely optional for Paul.

Not infrequently, it is concluded by examiners that a figure like the Apostle Paul would alter his behavior around different groups of people, in order to declare the good news to them. Paul could act Jewish, Paul could act Torah observant, Paul could act as one who was not Torah observant, as the need presumably required. Commentators are witnessed to invoke the term "chameleon" to describe the behavior of Paul, as Paul's accommodation of 1 Corinthians 9:20-23, as concluded by Hays, "is expressed in the form of submitting himself in various ways to the cultural structures and limitations of the people he hopes to reach with the gospel."<sup>6</sup>

Given some of the common conclusions one will encounter on 1 Corinthians 9:20-23—that the Apostle Paul somehow ceased being a Jew once he came to faith in Israel's Messiah—it is hardly surprising why a Messianic Jewish theologian like David J. Rudolph would take considerable issue with this. In his dissertation *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23*, he properly describes, "It is doubtful that Paul employed such a foolhardy strategy. Once his inconsistency with respect to basic Torah commandments became known, it would have caused to 'stumble' the very people he was trying to 'win'. His behaviour would have been seen as unprincipled and devious, thus bringing his message into disrepute."<sup>7</sup> He draws attention to Paul's words of 2 Corinthians 4:1-2:

"Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

The basic conclusion of Rudolph's dissertation, as he asserts, is that "As Jesus became all things to all people through eating with ordinary Jews, Pharisees and sinners, Paul became 'all things to all people' through eating with ordinary Jews, strict Jews (those 'under the law') and Gentile sinners."<sup>8</sup> A figure like the Apostle Paul did not stop considering himself Jewish, and so 1 Corinthians 9:20-23 is taken more to involve some kind of social concourse in declaring the good news, and with it various concessions that would necessarily have to be made. Rudolph would adhere to a somewhat literal view of Paul "becoming" something to the different categories of people listed in 1 Corinthians 9:20-23, even though he does not favor Paul become some kind of "chameleon" who radically changes his actions.

The major alternative to 1 Corinthians 9:20-23, involving the Apostle Paul changing his behavior to accommodate different groups of First Century people, is to approach Paul's "I became" (1 Corinthians 9:20, Brown and Comfort),<sup>9</sup> *egenomēn* (ἐγενόμην), from a rhetorical standpoint. The issue in immediate view is Paul's Divine commission to preach or proclaim the good news (1 Corinthians 9:16-18). Gordon D. Fee, who

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<sup>5</sup> Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, 206.

<sup>6</sup> Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 153.

<sup>7</sup> David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Brown and Comfort, 599.

does think that Paul altered his behavior around different groups of people, still concludes how the main issue Paul is discussing is the declaration of the gospel. Fee describes “[Paul’s] willingness to accommodate himself to whatever social setting he found himself in, so as ‘to win as many as possible.’ Such language, as the interchange with ‘save’ in v. 22b makes clear, can only refer to evangelizing.”<sup>10</sup>

With the overriding issue being the declaration of the good news, what is actually intended by Paul by “I became *something*”? The alternative to Paul literally changing his behavior around different groups of people—acting one way around one group, and acting in an opposite way around another, **which would rightfully merit a claim of dishonesty**—is that Paul’s “I became” is a rhetorical point regarding how he would make the conscious effort of putting himself in the place of different groups of people, in order to communicate the good news effectively to them. Paul was a Messianic Jew. Paul was “circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee” (Philippians 3:5). This did not change when he welcomed Yeshua into his life. But Paul was sent out by God into the Mediterranean, to declare the good news to his fellow Jews and those of the nations. Paul had to know something of the diverse worldviews, philosophies, ideologies, and stories of those whom he would encounter. An excellent example of this is how he debated over the issue of the resurrection with the Epicureans and Stoics in Acts 17, as he had to argue with them in words and concepts they would understand.

There are resources which would concur with the view that a rhetorical strategy is what Paul intended to convey from his “I became *something*” statements in 1 Corinthians 9:20-23. *The Apologetics Study Bible* appropriately describes, “Paul was no chameleon, changing colors to adapt to different environments. His message in all contexts was the same but his manner of communication differed according to the understandings of his audience.”<sup>11</sup> Noting that he became a “slave to all,” Shira Lander concludes in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, “The argument here can be misunderstood. Paul is not presenting himself as a dissembler who pretends to be something he is not in order to persuade people under false pretenses to become members of the community. Rather, as the parenthetical clause in v. 21 suggests, he is speaking to differing groups in terms they can understand.”<sup>12</sup>

Paul being able to say that he can identify with Jewish people, with those who are “under the Law,” with those who are “without law,” and with those who are “weak”—regardless of what specific importance one gives to these categories—does demonstrate a panoply of ministerial abilities. How would some of Paul’s peers in Jerusalem and Judea have handled some of the diverse groups of people in the ever-expanding community of Messiah followers out in the Mediterranean? How many of the First Century Jewish Believers were keen on placing themselves into the position of someone else—namely the position of pagan Greeks and Romans, those largely “without law”—in an effort to ably communicate the good news of Israel’s Messiah to them? Sampley interjects the useful point,

“What is true about the gospel is true about love, its central expression: Love always engages others, precisely where they are; it does not require them to come over or up to one’s standards before it can be operative.”<sup>13</sup>

Four distinct categories of persons are listed in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22. What does, or at least could, Paul mean when he says “I became *this*”? When approached from the perspective of rhetorical identification of an audience, what factors should we be considering from Paul’s ministry strategy?

**9:20a** Paul states, “**To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews**” (1 Corinthians 9:20a). Does this at all mean that Paul only acts like a Jew when around Jews, and that readers might justifiably consider Paul to think that his Jewish background and pedigree is relatively meaningless—in other words, that being a Jew means nothing to God? In spite of some of the various human limitations for the First Century Jewish community, and how Jewish ethnicity does not guarantee a Jewish person salvation, he does

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<sup>10</sup> Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp 426-427.

<sup>11</sup> Ted Cabal, gen. ed., *The Apologetics Study Bible*, HCSB (Nashville: Holman, 2007), 1721.

<sup>12</sup> Lander, in *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 301.

<sup>13</sup> Sampley, in *NIB*, 10:911.

say elsewhere, “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1-2).

The self-identification with the Jewish community that Paul may be more interested in, is sometimes suggested to be those various rites and practices that are not normative to day-to-day Torah living, like his participation in the Nazirite rituals in Acts 21:22-24. More significant, we should think, would be how the Jewish people should be the first to hear the good news of salvation in the Jewish Messiah (Romans 1:16), and with it a great deal of sensitivity issued for their unique needs. Many of these needs will be cultural and sociological, though, and not necessarily Scriptural. The needs of a broad First Century Jewish community, in both the Land of Israel and Diaspora—especially given the fallout from the Second Century B.C.E. Maccabean crisis,<sup>14</sup> and ongoing disparate relations with Rome—do need to be considered when Paul says “I became as a Jew.”

**9:20b** Paul’s lists his second category, “**to 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**” (1 Corinthians 9:20b), noting the condition of people who are *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) or “under law.” This terminology appears elsewhere in the Pauline letters (Galatians 3:23; 4:4-5, 21; 5:18; Romans 6:14-15), and as detailed by Douglas J. Moo in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, “We do not presume that ‘under the law’ must connote the same idea in each of its occurrences, although the stereotypical flavor of the phrase may point in this direction. Three general meanings of the phrase are popular: (1) under the condemnation pronounced by the law; (2) under a legalistic perversion of the law; and (3) under the law as a regime or power in a general sense.”<sup>15</sup> Customarily for 1 Corinthians 9:20b, it is concluded that the status here is Paul observing the Mosaic Torah as a way of living in obedience to God, and that this is a kind of parallel remark about Jewish identity.

Contrary to this common conclusion, it is hardly impossible to see *hupo nomon* or “under [the] law” here as relating to the condemnation of the Torah declared upon Law-breakers who are guilty. A significant part of Paul’s teaching elsewhere, such as in Romans 7:7-13 and the “I” sinner who especially struggles with obedience to God’s Torah—recognizing it as good, but also recognizing how his disobedience must be reckoned with—should not at all be overlooked. The Apostle Paul is surely concerned with the lives of those he encounters in gospel ministry, who know they are condemned by God’s Law as sinners, but do not really know what to do about it.

At the very most, 1 Corinthians 9:20b in association with 9:20a would suggest that while being “under the Law” or “under sin” is a universal condition to sinful humanity (cf. Romans 3:9; Galatians 3:22)—being “under the Law” would most especially be true of Jewish people who know they stand guilty before the Creator. Far from being ignorant of God’s Torah and the statutes they have broken, they know they need an answer to their dilemma. Yet, given how instruction from God is implanted onto the psyche of all human beings (Romans 2:14-15), there is a drive within all people to fix the problem of guilt for wrongdoing, as many know they have committed some kind of violation against the Supreme Deity who made the universe and has affixed certain absolutes for human behavior.

The advantage of viewing *hupo nomon* or “under the Law” as meaning “condemned by the Torah as a sinner,” certainly works against any accusation that could be brought against the good Apostle that self-identification means a dismissal of one’s personal integrity. In spite of the need to identify with different groups of people, Paul kept the Law as interpreted and demonstrated by the Messiah in all of his activities (1 Corinthians 9:21).

**9:21** The third group noted by Paul is, “**to those who are without law, as without law**” (1 Corinthians 9:21), noting those who are *anomos* (ἄνομος) or “outside the law” (RSV). It would seem very difficult for *anomos* to mean “lawless” here, as though Paul would orient his behavior to a level of sheer

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<sup>14</sup> Consult the author’s article “The Impact of the Maccabees on First Century Judaism,” appearing in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper*, for some worthwhile thoughts about some of the First Century Jewish social challenges present in the Apostolic Scriptures.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in Wayne G. Strickland, ed., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 361.

unrighteousness. Anthony C. Thiselton indicates that those who are *anomos* concerns “Gentiles who are **outside** the revealed **law** of the OT and Judaism,”<sup>16</sup> with the NIV actually having “those not having the law.” While all to some degree have laws from their Creator imprinted into their makeup as humans made in His image, here what is probably in mind is how Paul had to argue about God’s goodness and who Yeshua was using entirely philosophical means, as is witnessed in Acts 17:22-23 when arguing with the Athenians. There, Paul made note of the Temple to the Unknown God and associated it as being a memorial to the Holy One of Israel. He also had difficulty explaining the concept of the resurrection to many of those people. There were people who just had no quantitative framework for understanding who Israel’s God was through Israel’s Torah.

Confusion can ensue when one encounters, as it is rendered in the NASU, Paul’s claim in 1 Corinthians 9:21b, “**though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.**” Paul himself is not *anomos* or without God’s Law, but instead is *ennomos Christou* (ἐννομος Χριστοῦ). This terminology is rendered by the YLT as “within law to Christ,” the TLV as “in Messiah’s *Torah*,” and with the CJB/CJSB expressing a value judgment with, “within the framework of *Torah* as upheld by the Messiah.” The rendering “under the law of Christ” is not correct, otherwise the Greek source text would read something like *hupo nomon Christou* (ὑπὸ νόμον Χριστοῦ). But this is not what appears. So, in what way is the Apostle Paul “in-lawed to Christ”?

Many interpreters connect 1 Corinthians 9:21c to Galatians 6:2, where the Apostle says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ [*ton nomon tou Christou*, τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ].” Thiselton states, “The phrase ἐννομος Χριστοῦ [is] **subject to the law of Christ.**”<sup>17</sup> Some view this as Yeshua’s teaching in His Sermon on the Mount, and it is surely justified to view “within law to Christ” as meaning the Messiah’s definitive interpretation and application of Moses’ Teaching. Hays somewhat protests, however, claiming that “Paul does not mean that he has acquired a new legal code of commandments to obey (such as the teachings of Jesus); rather, he is asserting that the pattern of Christ’s self-sacrificial death on a cross has now become the normative pattern for his own existence.”<sup>18</sup> Of course, Yeshua did teach “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24),<sup>19</sup> and emulating the Messiah understandably involves a significant degree of self-sacrifice on the part of all born again Believers! But the Messiah’s service *and sacrifice* is predicated upon the validity of the Mosaic Torah. Craig Blomberg rightly affirms that “the law of Christ” involves some adherence to both the Messiah’s teachings and instructions seen in the Tanach Scriptures:

“God’s will is now summed up as Christ’s law (v. 21; cf. Gal 6:2), which probably includes both Jesus’ explicit teachings as well as the laws of the Old Testament as they now apply in light of the work of Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

The standing question and debate between today’s Messianics and their evangelical Christian counterparts will be in **how much** of the Torah does Yeshua actually affirm for His followers *to keep*—with the latter arguing for less than the former.

Fee’s remarks on 1 Corinthians 9:21 are actually appropriate. He asserts, “I [Paul] am *ennomos* (lit. ‘in law’=subject to law) toward Christ. His point is plain: He wishes no misunderstanding of the word *anomos*, which would ordinarily mean to behave in a godless way. To be ‘as one without law’ does not mean to be ‘lawless.’”<sup>21</sup> Trying to understand the worldview and perspectives of those who are completely ignorant of God’s Torah, does not mean that a minister of the gospel like Paul all of a sudden becomes lawless and unrighteous. And interestingly enough, an interpreter like Fee—who does not think that obedience to the Mosaic Torah is expected in the post-resurrection era—still has to appeal to the New Covenant promise of Ezekiel 36:26-27 in his remarks about “the law of Christ.”

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<sup>16</sup> Thiselton, 703.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 703.

<sup>18</sup> Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 154.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Mark 8:34; Matthew 10:38; Luke 9:23.

<sup>20</sup> Blomberg, 184.

<sup>21</sup> Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 430.

9:22a The fourth and final category, listed by Paul to the Corinthians, is how he states, “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak” (1 Corinthians 9:22a). Fee warns readers that “one must be careful of too specific an identification with the ‘weak’...”<sup>22</sup> Many interpreters have associated the “weak” here with overly-scrupulous Believers, such as those who would not eat meat during the fellowship gatherings of various Roman Messiah followers (Romans 14:2). Others have made connections with the weak brothers and sisters mentioned previously in 1 Corinthians ch. 8. While these are possibilities, those who are *asthenēs* (ἀσθενής) could also just mean “the defeated, the demoralized” (The Message). Paul’s great compassion for the lame man at Lystra is surely to be considered here (Acts 14:8).

Also be aware of how earlier in this letter it has been asserted how “that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God” (1 Corinthians 1:26b-29). The weak could very easily be those of low birth, including those like slaves. Thiselton further observes, “**the weak** may mean those whose options for life and conduct were severely restricted because of their dependence on *the wishes of patrons, employers, or slave owners.*”<sup>23</sup> Stephen C. Barton similarly thinks, “For Paul, this means stepping down the social ladder and working with his own hands to support himself in order to make the gospel ‘free of charge’ to the majority.”<sup>24</sup>

9:22b-23 The intention Paul conveys is, “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22b, NRSV). The four groups mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 might be the main general groups that Paul encountered in ministry service. But, 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 lists only a number of possible ministry audiences that Paul could have serviced with the good news in the First Century. Some level of identification with them and their unique needs, conditions, and social position would be necessary in order to be effective. Paul surely knew that across the diverse landscape of the Mediterranean he would need to communicate the gospel in as sensitive and meaningful way as he could to the varied segments of its societies.

What other groups of people could Paul have added to his list? Is Paul a Zealot around Zealots? A Pharisee among Pharisees? Circumcised to those circumcised, and uncircumcised to those uncircumcised? Rich to those who are rich? Poor to those who are poor? Wise to those wise, and ignorant to those ignorant? Greek to those who are Greek? Roman to those who are Roman? Leon Morris offers the comment, “The apostle did not stand on his dignity, but adapted himself to the position of his hearers in a whole-hearted determination to win them for Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

The advantage of approaching Paul’s “I became *something*” statements of 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, as a level of self-identification when communicating to a particular audience, has a significant advantage over the more customary thought that Paul accommodated and changed his behavior around different groups of ancient people. Fee’s particular weakness on reading 1 Corinthians 9:21-23 is that he indeed thinks that Paul has an “apparently chameleonlike stance in matters of social relationships.”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps not unlike the Dominion Changelings or shapeshifters on the fictional series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, the good Apostle can alter his form or appearance for the sake of an audience. While self-identification with an audience, putting oneself in the place of another to better understand another, is good and most honorable—thinking that Apostle Paul **significantly altered** his behavior around different groups could see him not only legitimately accused of being a disloyal Jew, but also having dishonorable motives to others in proclaiming the Messiah. Within such a model *Paul shifts and accommodates himself to an audience*, flip flopping in his

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp 430-431.

<sup>23</sup> Thiselton, 705.

<sup>24</sup> Barton, in *ECB*, 1333.

<sup>25</sup> Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 135.

<sup>26</sup> Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 423.

personality and practices to meet the moods of others, no different than a sleazy politician trying to win votes—kissin’ babies but later stealin’ their lollipops.<sup>27</sup>

It is to be fairly noted, though, that hardly all who adhere to such a model of accommodation, think that Paul accommodated on matters of pagan idolatry or blatant capital sin. David E. Garland states how Paul “did not tone down his assault on idolatry to avoid offending idolater to curry favor with them. His accommodation has nothing to do with watering down the gospel message, soft-pedaling its ethical demands, or compromising its absolute monotheism.”<sup>28</sup>

The issue elucidated in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 is actually in recognizing the various limitations of cross-cultural ministry, and how in order to be effective, one must put himself or herself in another person’s place. Any person who knows he or she is going out into a wide world of people and ideas, *to declare forth the redemption of Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus)*, conducts some degree of research to know his or her audience. This does not mean that one adopts a pagan lifestyle or culture that is blatantly non-Biblical. It does mean that one does not show up at a place completely ignorant of paganism and the various social and cultural challenges one will encounter.

Within such cross-cultural ministry, with Paul going into the Mediterranean world into strange and diverse areas, he was going to encounter people who had no knowledge or initial inclination for really understanding the Law of Israel’s God. And as he says, he does try to identify with those “outside the law...that I might win those outside the law” (1 Corinthians 9:21a, d, RSV). Yet, Paul insists that he by no means is “without law toward God” (1 Corinthians 9:21b, RSV), *mē ōn anomos Theou* (μὴ ὦν ἄνομος θεοῦ).

While among 1 Corinthians commentaries, it is far more frequent to find those who conclude that Paul saying “I became *something*” does indeed involve his change of behavior—perhaps via a chameleon fashion—there are still some useful points which are made as they involve the Apostle’s self-identification with a group of people. Ciampa and Rosner offer the general thoughts,

“Here Paul’s goal of saving members of these different groups presumably relates to his ministry of preaching the gospel among them. But these verses help clarify that it is not merely the preaching of the gospel per se that is important, but the preaching of the gospel through a messenger who incarnates its message such that the hearers can both understand it clearly from one who obviously empathizes with them and can see what it would look like if it took root in them.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This is a line attributed to the fictional U.S. national security adviser Jeffrey Pelt, in the 1990 film *The Hunt for Red October*.

<sup>28</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 435.

<sup>29</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, pp 430-431.