

1 Corinthians 9:19-27 — Embrace Change for the Gospel

October 31, 2021

If you are new, it is great to have you. Last week, we began a new series called Vision. This is a four-week study in which Pastor Jordan and I are sharing the elders' 5-year vision for the future of CrossWinds on both of our campuses. There are seven points in the elders' vision. Those points are found in your bulletin insert. These detail the areas the elders want to focus on in the church for the next five years. They believe focusing on these areas will help us better live out our mission of "Reaching People With Jesus." They also believe focusing on these points will help us better live out our core values. We looked at those briefly last week. If you want to read more about them, they are found at the web link found at the top of your Vision bulletin insert.

Last week, I introduced you to the first of the seven points. We spent an entire week on the first point because it is such an important point. In many ways, the other points in the elder's vision all flow from this first point. Let's read that point together to refresh our memory. It is found on the top of your sermon handout.

1. We are tirelessly focused on reaching people with Jesus, willing to leave the 99 for the one.

To help us better understand what that means, last week we went to Luke 15. In that chapter, we looked at one of Jesus' greatest parables. It is his longest parable. It is Jesus' only triple parable. It is one parable made up of three stories. The story of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. The point in each of

the stories is the same. Jesus wanted us to know that God loves people who are far from God. We tend to avoid people far from God. God loves people far from him so much he sent his own son to die for them. As we learned in the story of the lost sheep, God experiences more joy in heaven when one lost person repents than from 99 righteous people who do not need to repent. If we are going to bring joy to God in this life, we must value what God values. We must love reaching lost people with the good news of Jesus. We must celebrate when Jesus transforms their lives and they are born again.

As a church, the vision of the elders is for us to have a much greater focus on reaching the lost in our community. From our church budget, we support missionaries to the tune of more than \$90,000 a year. We value reaching lost people for Jesus overseas. We also must realize God has us in Spirit Lake and in Spencer to be missionaries in our local communities. God has us here to reach the lost around us, not to ignore the lost.

Where do we go from here? I told you the rest of the points build off this point. Today, we will look at points 2 and 6. Both of them pertain to change. They answer the question, "How much should we be willing to give up? How much should we be willing to change so that we can reach people with Jesus?"

Next week, we will look at points 3, 4, and 5. They all pertain to loving our neighbors. They talk about how we must change to love our neighbors and to reach our neighbors with the good news of Jesus.

In the final week, we will look at point 7. This point reminds us how seriously we will take these directives to pursue the lost in our community. It

would be so easy to just let me be a talking head. It is easy to let Sunday afternoon roll around and forget everything the Word of God taught us Sunday morning. We do not want to be that way with this series. We want to put teeth into this series. We want to create traction so we actually reach the lost around us.

So this morning, we will look at the topic of change as shown to us by points 2 and 6 in the elders' vision. Let's begin by reading each point, then I will explain the point. Then we will circle back and look at the biblical support behind these points. Let's do them in reverse order and start with point 6.

6. We change and give up what we like for the sake of others. We are known as a church that embraces change.

This point is about change. There are two parts of it. The first sentence states that we want to be a church that embraces change, specifically a church that is willing to give up what we like for the sake of others, that is for the sake of better reaching people in our community with Jesus. We want to be a church that is willing to give up on our preferences, things we like, our traditions, and even things that are meaningful to us if giving up those things will help us better reach people in our community with the good news of Jesus.

We will never give up the gospel. We will always keep our fingers in the text. We will stay anchored to the non-negotiable of the Bible. There are other things about the way we operate as a church that are not biblically mandated. They grow out of our traditions, our preferences, and what feels comfortable to us from our backgrounds. While none of those things are necessarily wrong, if

they hinder our effectiveness when we are trying to reach lost people around us with the good news of Jesus, we must change. Reaching lost people with Jesus is more important than us being comfortable. Many times our preferences or traditions subtly become a barrier to effectively and relevantly sharing the gospel message in the culture in which we live.

To give you a fun example. Let's go back to the early 1990s. Believe it or not, I was alive at the time, and I was a young pastor. At that time, pastors were expected to wear suits to church. If you grew up in the church, you also wore a suit to church. The problem was that in many places, the world no longer wore suits. Business casual was popular. In addition, most people wore blue jeans. As a pastor, in the community where I lived, I invited people to church but they told me they didn't want to come to church because they didn't have a suit. Many of those people were blue collar workers that didn't own a suit, and they weren't about to purchase a suit just so they could visit a church.

Those who wore suits to church did not wear them for bad reasons. There were good reasons behind their motives. They would tell me that God deserves the best so they wanted to wear their best to church. I understand their heart. The problem was the insistence on their preference of wearing a suit, the keeping up of their traditions, was inadvertently becoming a barrier to the unsaved in the community who wouldn't dare walk into the church because they didn't own a suit and wouldn't wear a suit.

The gospel didn't need to change to reach lost people. Those who insisted on wearing a suit needed to change. They needed to value reaching the lost in

their community more. They needed to be committed to removing any barriers that would keep the lost from walking through the doors of the church.

This is why we want to be a church that embraces change to better reach the people in the lost culture around us. Do the elders expect these changes will be hard and feel unnatural to many of us? Yes. We make those changes because effectively reaching the lost is more important than holding onto the preferences and traditions that keep us comfortable.

The second part of this point deals with how we handle change. We don't want to be a church that begrudgingly tolerates change. We want to be a church that enthusiastically embraces changes that help us reach more lost people with Jesus so we can bring more joy to God's heart.

Point 2 relates to this.

2. We have made space for new people to serve and lead.

We don't just want to be a church that strategically embraces change to better reach our community with Jesus. We also want to be a church that eagerly empowers new people to serve and provides real opportunities for young people to lead. Paul reminded us of this in 2 Timothy 2:2.

...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)

Too many times churches end up being run by a small group of people, an inner clique that holds all the positions of power and makes all the decisions. We don't want to be that way. As God raises up new leaders in the church and young leaders in the church, we want them to have real opportunities to serve and lead.

We do not want to be a church with a small inner circle that holds all the power and then eventually dies. That is not good.

Paul's method was to constantly be training a new generation of leaders then give them real leadership opportunities. Paul empowered Timothy, Titus, and other young men with real leadership responsibility. Paul did not drop them into leadership positions cold. He mentored and coached them. In fact, in our Bible the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy as well as the letter of Titus are Paul's coaching letters to these young men helping them lead even better. We want to be that kind of church. We provide real leadership opportunities to new people and to young people. Like Paul, we coach them up, helping them succeed.

These goals all sound well and good. Is there biblical support behind them? What does the Bible say about giving up our preferences and embracing change for the sake of reaching the lost in our communities? To answer that question, I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Let's read the text together then study it.

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 (ESV)

These verses are about evangelism. They are about giving our freedoms in Christ and our preferences to more effectively reach the lost in the community around us.

Before we dissect these verses, we must admit that when we think about evangelism and reaching people with Jesus, the apostle Paul was one of the best evangelists to ever live. He was extremely effective when it came to telling people about Jesus. I thought it might do us a little good to briefly think about what made Paul so effective at reaching the lost with the gospel message since we are going to focus on doing that as a church.

Why was Paul so effective at sharing Jesus?

He had the right message.

One of the reasons Paul was effective is because he had the right message. He knew the gospel. If you don't know the gospel, you cannot be effective sharing the gospel. The gospel is not about us earning brownie points with God by the things we do. It is not about us paying for our own sin. It is about God loving us in ways we don't deserve. It is about God sending Jesus, his own son to die on a cross to pay for our sin. The gospel says that all we can do is trust in what Jesus has done to let Jesus pay for our sin. We don't make ourselves right with God. We trust in Jesus, God's own son, to forgive our sin and make us right with God. That is the gospel. Does it matter how we live? Yes, it does. We live a holy life as an expression of gratitude to God, not to earn favor with God. Anyone who has been forgiven by Jesus is overwhelmed with gratitude to Jesus and they live holy lives not because they have to but because they want to. Jesus changed their hearts. That is the gospel. It is only when you know the gospel that you can effectively share the gospel.

He had a compelling motive.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

I want to tell you up front that I don't like this translation. It can be a touch misleading. In this verse Paul reminded us that as Christians, we will all appear before Jesus' judgment seat to be rewarded by Jesus for what we have done in this life. Paul closed this verse by saying "whether good or evil." That is where a misunderstanding can be introduced. It sounds like we will be punished for our sins, the evil things we have done. Didn't we just talk about Jesus forgiving our sins? This is confusing. What is going on in this verse? I like the Greek to better understand the meaning of these words. In Greek, the word good can also mean valuable. The word evil can also be translated valueless. The judgment we will have as Christians when we stand before Jesus for how we live will not be about the good and evil in our lives. Our sins are already forgiven by Jesus. Our judgment will be based on what we did with our lives after becoming Christians, was it valuable or valueless? After becoming Christians, did we use our lives in a worthwhile way for God's kingdom growing the church and sharing the gospel, or did we hide our faith not creating anything of value for the kingdom with our lives? That is how we will be judged by Jesus.

Paul wanted to be richly rewarded by Jesus on the day he stood before Jesus. Paul knew God has more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 righteous people who do not need to repent. Since leading people to Jesus adds so much value to the kingdom, Paul poured himself into sharing the gospel.

The day of judgment when we are rewarded by Jesus for growing the kingdom should not just motivate Paul to share the gospel, but it should also motivate us to share the gospel. We will be richly rewarded by Jesus on the way we stand before him when we have shared the gospel.

He had a good plan.

In the book of Acts, we find Paul was effective in sharing the gospel because he had a strategy. He would go into a new town where the good news of Jesus was not known. First, he would go to the Jewish synagogue and tell the Jews about Jesus. If they rejected him, he went to the Gentiles in the city and told them about Jesus. After he had a group of people in the city following Jesus, a church was begun. He then moved to a new community and started over again. Paul was successful in sharing the gospel because he had a plan to share the gospel. My point is that if we don't have a plan to share the gospel as a church, we will fail to share the gospel. Coming out of this series, we will have an evangelism strategy to help us better reach our community.

He was willing to sacrifice almost anything if it helped him better communicate with people who needed Jesus.

Paul was willing to set aside any preference, right, or freedom if it would help him better communicate the good news of Jesus to people who needed to hear it. This is key for us this morning.

If Paul was willing to give up his likes, his freedoms, and preferences to reach people with Jesus, we also must be willing to give up our likes, our freedoms, and our preferences to reach lost people with Jesus.

Where our text begins in chapter 9, Paul was coming out of a discussion about eating meat sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians 8. The Corinthians were happy to eat the meat sacrificed to idols because they knew they had the freedom to do so. As Christians, they knew idols were nothing. Their food didn't affect their faith. Their relationship with God was based on Jesus, not what they ate.

While Paul affirmed that the Corinthians had the freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols because it was cheaper to purchase in the meat markets, Paul did encourage the Corinthians to limit their freedom out of love for the new Christians who were less spiritually mature in the church. The baby Christians in the church came out of a pagan background. Seeing the mature Corinthian Christians eating meat that was at one time sacrificed to idols created cognitive confusion in their mind. They just left a life of idol worship, now they saw their church leaders eating idol meat. This was confusing to them.

Paul told the Corinthians that while they had the freedom to eat whatever they wanted because our relationship with God is based on faith in Jesus, not on food, from the perspective of loving younger Christians, Corinthians Christians were to avoid idol meat. Love your brothers. If enjoying your freedoms in Christ would hurt your brother, curtail those freedoms.

As we come into the passage we read this morning, Paul was taking the principle of curtailing your freedoms in Christ to love your younger Christians brother, and he was expanding it. We should also curtail our freedoms in Christ, and we should give up our preferences and traditions if any of those things will help us reach more people with Jesus.

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)

Paul said, "I don't need to observe the Old Testament law. I don't need to observe special holidays. If my freedoms in Christ are hindering me from effectively reaching lost people in my culture with the good news of Jesus, I will give up my freedoms."

In the Bible, there are things that are clearly biblically right and wrong. We don't bend on those things. There are also grey areas where as Christians we have the freedom to do things different ways and live our our preferences. Paul said, "If my freedoms and preferences are diminishing my ability to effectively talk with people about Jesus, I must give them up. Telling people about Jesus is far more important than enjoying my freedoms in Christ and doing things the way I want them done."

I must be willing to deny my freedoms and preferences to more effectively share the gospel.

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)

Paul said he was free from Old Testament rules and regulations. The Old Testament didn't allow pork or shellfish. Paul ate bacon, shrimp, and lobster because he didn't need to follow the Old Testament food laws. The Old Testament also said you could not wear a piece of clothing woven with differing materials. Paul had a new cotton/polyester blend T-shirt, and he loved to wear it. He was free to wear it in Christ. Food didn't influence his relationship with God. Fabric didn't impact his relationship with God. While Paul said he had freedom in all these matters, he gave up on these freedoms and made himself a servant to

other people. That is a very strong word. Paul was willing to do whatever it will took to reach people with the good news of Jesus. I will voluntarily give up any freedom and any tradition if it will help me better talk to lost people about Jesus. How far does this go? How much of his freedoms was Paul willing to sacrifice to reach people with the gospel?

Let's look at some Scripture.

...for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. 2 Timothy 2:9–10 (ESV)

Paul said he was willing to be in prison. He was willing to go to jail. He was willing to be treated as a criminal if that would help save more people. Would you be willing to spend months or a year in jail just so you could lead a few people to Christ from that experience?

The Corinthians were saying the opposite. They were saying, "I am free in Christ. I can do what I want in Christ. I can eat meat sacrificed to idols. It doesn't matter if that stresses out a young believer. I don't care. It doesn't matter if my freedom pushes people away from the gospel message. All I care about is exercising my freedoms in Christ, my rights in Christ.

On the other side was Paul. He had freedoms in Christ, but he was willing to give all of them up, he was even willing to rot in jail if that is what it took to lead more people to Jesus. Do you see the contrast?

In verses 20 and following, Paul gave us illustrations of what it looked like for him to to give up his traditions, preferences, and freedoms for the sake of

effectively communicating the gospel message to the culture he was trying to reach.

Paul accommodated Jewish culture to reach the Jews.

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 1 Corinthians 9:20 (ESV)

Paul was constantly working with the Jews, trying to reach them with the good news of what Jesus had done for them. When Paul was around the Jews, even though he was free from the Sabbath, Jewish holidays, Jewish food laws, and all the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, he followed those laws to adapt to their culture. Paul took on the Jewish culture in order to win Jews to Jesus in that culture. Remember Paul was free to ignore Jewish customs and traditions, but he was willing to practice Jewish customs and traditions to be able to better share the good news of Jesus with them.

To illustrate what this type of cultural accommodation looks like in action, let's go to Acts 15. This passage is about the Jerusalem council. At the time, they were trying to determine what to do with Gentile converts. All kinds of non-Jewish people were trusting in Jesus and being born again. The Jews did not know what to do with Gentile Christians. There were a bunch of Jews who said, now that they have trusted in Jesus, we need to make them follow all of the Jewish traditions, customs, and holidays. Jesus was Jewish, now we need to make these Gentiles Jewish. Others were saying that was not right. If God accepted them while they were still Gentiles, why did they now need to become Jewish?

This question was extremely important when it came to the topic of circumcision. Jewish men were circumcised. Gentile men were not circumcised.

Some of the Jewish Christians were saying the new Gentile Christians didn't just need to adopt Jewish holidays, food laws, and Sabbaths but they also needed to be circumcised.

As you would expect, the Gentile Christians had no interest in a sharp object touching that part of their bodies. This was a serious controversy. The Jerusalem council met to decide if new Gentile Christians needed to become Jewish when they turned to Jesus. When we turn to Acts 15, we see James delivering the decision of the council.

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.
Acts 15:19–20 (ESV)

James said these Gentile Christians do not need to become Jewish. At that point, all the Gentile men wiped the bead of sweat off their brows. Then James said there were four things the Jerusalem council was asking the new Gentile Christians to follow. Let's walk through them and see why James and the Jerusalem council made these requests.

1. They were to abstain from things polluted by idols. This is the same thing talked about in the Corinthian letter. This is meat offered to idols. Why were these new Gentile Christians not to exercise their freedom and eat this meat? There are two reasons. First, as we saw in Paul's Corinthian letter, for baby Christians, eating meat sacrificed to idols caused them emotional distress and confusion. Out of love for the baby Christians, while these Gentile Christians had the freedom to eat idol meat, they were to avoid doing it anyway out of love for their weaker brothers. Even more was the impact eating idol meat would have on

the Jewish people they were trying to reach with the gospel. The Jews hated idol worship. They wanted nothing to do with idol worship. If Jews saw these new Gentile Christians eating meat that was at one time offered to idols, it would upset them. It would infuriate them. If these Gentile Christians ate meat that was at one time offered to idols, it would make it very difficult to share the good news of Jesus with them. They would be unnecessarily offended. So James asked the Gentile Christians to limit their freedom, to not eat idol meat, and to do this so the Jews were not offended and the gospel could be better shared with them.

2. They were to stay away from fornication. That is sexual sin. That is not a cultural accommodation. That is clear cut in all of the Scriptures. The marriage bed is to be kept pure. That is not a debatable topic.

3. They were to stay away from things that were strangled. Why was that off limits? The Gentiles would customarily eat strangled animals. When you went to an ancient meat market a common method of killing the animal was strangulation. That way blood didn't get all over the place and you could take the animal home to cook it for dinner. The problem was that Jewish tradition was very clear in the Old Testament, when an animal was killed, you were to drain the blood on the ground. Jews were not to eat the blood. The life was in the blood. In meat markets the blood was not customarily drained from an animal because it left a leaking wound for the customer. While these new Gentile Christians were free in Christ to eat any kind of meat they chose, including the meat of a strangled animal, the Jerusalem council asked these new Gentile Christians not to do this because it would unnecessarily offend Jews around them, erecting an

inadvertent barrier to sharing the gospel and diminishing the effectiveness of people sharing the gospel with Jewish people in the community. Once again, we see that Gentiles had freedom to live as they wanted but they were asked to limit their freedom to better reach a lost culture with the good news of Jesus.

4. They were to abstain from blood. I know today is Halloween. This is my one Halloween reference --- the drinking of blood. In Gentile culture, they drank blood. I know that sounds gross, but that is just what they did. In the Jewish culture, they were to pour the blood on the ground and not drink it. In order to not offend the Jews, so the gospel message could be more effectively shared with the Jews, the Gentile Christians were asked to limit their freedom to not cause an unnecessary offense with the lost Jewish culture so many were trying to reach.

We see that three of the four requests of the Jerusalem council all dealt with cultural accommodations, the voluntary limiting of freedoms in Christ to better reach a lost culture with the good news of Christ. If you are unsure if that is the proper way to understand the Jerusalem council, simply look at the next verse and you will see this is exactly what happened.

For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues. Acts 15:21 (ESV)

So we see this theme runs through many parts of Scripture. We limit our traditions, our preferences, and even our freedoms in Christ to better reach the lost culture we are trying to reach with Christ.

How serious does this become? Let's look at Acts 16 and see.

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was

well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. Acts 16:1–3 (ESV)

Timothy came from a mixed marriage. His father was a Greek. His mother was Jewish. His mother would be considered a traitor to the Jewish faith. As the son of a Gentile father, Timothy was uncircumcised at birth. Paul planned to have Timothy travel with him. Timothy was eager to travel with Paul and help Paul share the good news of Jesus. The problem is many Jews would have automatically been offended by Timothy and unwilling to listen to him simply because he was uncircumcised. Paul knew circumcision did not effect Timothy's faith. What did Paul do?

Paul said to Timothy, "I know you are an adult male. I know they haven't invented novocaine. I know this would be really painful, but I have a sharp knife. I think we need to go to the backyard and take care of business." Timothy agreed to it. Why was Timothy willing to undergo the extreme pain of being circumcised as an adult male without novocaine? It enabled him to more effectively share the gospel with Jewish people. Paul and Timothy were willing to do anything to adopt the culture they were trying to reach with the gospel, even if it involved circumcision without novocaine!

Let me step out of teaching for a moment and step into application. At CrossWinds, we are trying to reach the lost people around us in the Spirit Lake and Spencer communities with Jesus. We must do whatever it takes to accommodate that culture, to be relevant to that culture, to reach that culture. We have adopted a more modern worship style. Some people tell me they do not like

the style of worship music we have right now. They wish it was the style we sang years ago. I appreciate that. I also enjoy an older style of worship. The truth is we are not trying to make Christians comfortable. We are not trying to reach you. You already know Jesus. We are trying to do anything we can to reach the lost in the community around us. We are giving up our preferences, our traditions, and even our freedoms in Christ if giving up those things will help us more effectively reach the lost in our community with the good news of Jesus

If Timothy was willing to be circumcised as an adult male without anesthesia so he could more effectively talk about Jesus to Jewish culture, we should be willing to tolerate a more modern style of worship even if it is not our cup of tea. What matters more than Christians being comfortable is Christians giving up the things they love to better fit into a lost culture in order to reach that culture for Jesus. Remember Paul's motto: I will not bend on the gospel, but I will accommodate the culture I am trying to reach in any way I can in order to better reach them for Jesus. That is why when Paul was around the Jewish people, even though under Jesus he was no longer obligated to follow Jewish laws and culture, he chose to follow Jewish laws and culture to better reach them for Jesus.

To Gentiles, Paul became a Gentile to reach the Gentiles.

To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 1 Corinthians 9:21 (ESV)

Now Paul moved from how he voluntarily practiced Jewish traditions and ceremonies when trying to reach Jews, to ignoring the Jewish laws and ceremonies when he was with Gentiles. When with the Gentiles, Paul no longer

cared about Kosher food and Sabbaths. Incidentally, Paul gave a quick caveat. He was not ignoring God's moral law. He was ignoring the ceremonial law. Paul didn't want Jewish cultural hangups to become a barrier around Gentile people when he was trying to reach them with Jesus.

To the weak, Paul became weak to reach the weak.

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak... 1 Corinthians 9:22 (ESV)

Who are the weak? This would be new Christians, baby Christians. These baby Christians didn't yet understand they were free from the old traditions and the Sabbaths. When Paul was around them, he didn't mock them or chastise them, he just acted like them in order to not offend them so he could better talk to them about the gospel. These new Christians still went to the temple. They kept the Sabbath. They followed Jewish cooking laws. Paul said, what is more important? Insisting on our freedom in Christ or limiting your freedom in Christ to tell more people about Jesus? Folks, the greatest joy in heaven is when lost people repent. We must not let our preferences and traditions get in the way of sharing the gospel!

Do we have an illustration of Paul doing this? We do. It is found in Acts 21. Paul was back in Jerusalem. He was anxious to bring the offering he had for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. When he arrived in town, he learned there were many rumors circulating about him. These rumors were half truths. Some were claiming Paul said Jewish Christians were to no longer keep the ceremonial law. That is not what Paul taught. He taught Jews were no longer obligated to keep the ceremonial law. Others claimed that Paul taught Jewish Christians were to

not have their male children circumcised. That is not what Paul taught. He taught that Jewish Christians were no longer obligated to have their children circumcised. Our relationship with God is based on Jesus, not circumcision. It doesn't matter either way on circumcision.

James had an idea on how to dispel these rumors about Paul in Jerusalem.

Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. Acts 21:23–24 (ESV)

These guys were taking an Old Testament Nazarite vow. That kind of vow could last for any length of days. During it, you didn't cut your hair and you avoided alcohol. At the end of the vow, you shaved your head as an offering to God and presented it at the temple. Obviously, Paul didn't need to do this. He was free from needing to observe these Old Testament obligations. Paul chose to join some of the weaker Jewish Christians in observing this vow in order to not offend the Jews and better tell them about Jesus.

You see, what this is telling us is much of evangelism is not all about evangelism. It is pre-evangelism. It is accommodating yourself to the culture you are trying to reach. It is earning the right to be heard so you can better tell people about Jesus. That is why Paul closed these verses with these words.

...I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 1 Corinthians 9:22 (ESV)

Paul's goal was saving more and more people. While Paul never compromised the gospel message when he was reaching a culture, he willingly

gave up his freedoms in Christ, his preferences, and traditions to better reach the culture he was trying to reach with Christ.

Conclusion

Many of you know I used to pastor a small rural church in Michigan before coming to CrossWinds. When I arrived at that church, they had just made the change from organ music to a band. As you can guess, there were a lot of people who did not like the change. Many were pretty vocal. Some of the vocal ones would sit in the foyer until the worship music was over out of protest then come in to hear the sermon.

One of these people was an older woman with a walker. One day I got up the nerve to talk with her. I braced myself for what I expected would be a tongue lashing. That isn't what happened. When I asked her how she was handling the change in worship style she said, "I can't stand the music, but I love the band." I asked her why she meant by that. She said, "My grandson, his wife and their children are finally back to church. Do you know how many years I prayed for him to come back to Christ. Now my grandson is playing bass in the new band. If this is what it takes to get him to church, I don't like the music, but I love the band."

Her grandson had long hair and tattoos before they were popular. He was covered in tattoos. He lived a hard life before coming to Christ. He never wore a short-sleeved shirt, even in July, because the tattoos on his arms were of naked ladies. That tells you how hard he ran from God.

The new band didn't just bring Mike back to church but Mike gave his life to Christ, then he started inviting his friends to church. His friends looked just like him. They also had crazy tattoos and hardware drilled into their faces. They also

met Jesus at that church. His friend who played the guitar had gauges in his ears. His ears were so stretched out you could put three fingers through the holes in his ears. The good news is all of them came to Christ. All of them were born again. All of them found a place to serve in the church in the new band.

As 90-year-old Carol sat in the foyer with her hands on a walker, I will remember her words. "I can't stand the music, but I love the band. My grandson came back to church. I never thought I would see him up there leading worship. Boy am I thankful we changed to fit the culture."

This is exactly what the elders are talking about in this point. More important than us insisting on our preferences and traditions is us changing to fit our culture to be better able to reach lost people with the good news of Jesus. I pray we have many stories at CrossWinds Church like the one I just told you because we embraced change for the gospel.



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