

Winning More: I Corinthians 9:19-23

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Introduction:

I've been thinking about the last five years. I think we have made some great strides. We are doctrinally stronger. We are much better on following up with guests. We are more loving to each other and to those who come in among us. We sacrifice financially when brethren are in need. We are working hard on our Bible classes. Our singing is better. We are praying better. Our assemblies are more focused and, in my opinion, better. However, I have one major area of concern. It concerns me because it is at the heart of why Jesus came and why He put us here. According to **Luke 19:10**, Jesus came to seek and save the lost. That needs to be at the heart of our mission individually and as a congregation. In five years, we have baptized three people, not counting children of members. While the baptisms of members' children is absolutely important (just ask anyone who has a child that has not been baptized), they do not represent evangelism done by the congregation per se.

I take full responsibility for this. It is not necessarily my job to do all the evangelism, however it is my job to set the example and provide the equipping that will help us be a more evangelistic congregation (cf. **Ephesians 4:11-12**). I can tell you exactly where my weakness has been and how we need to work together to turn this around. To be honest with you, when people come into our assemblies, I'm decent at introducing myself and then seeking a study. Once we get into a study, I'm very good at leading that. At my last work in Beaumont, TX, I was spoiled. We had so many guests in our assemblies that I was covered over with studies most of the time. We had between 17 and 25 baptisms a year there. However, in the past five years we have had very few community guests who were not Christians and even fewer who have been repeat guests. My common supply for getting studies is simply not taking place here. Then I allowed myself to get into a rut. You see, what I'm not good at is just meeting people, having conversations with people and then turning them to spiritual things. I'm just not naturally good at that. One of my earliest memories of this goes back to the summer before my fourth grade year. My family had moved to Abilene, Texas. We moved into our house and my parents were constantly encouraging me to go meet kids in the neighborhood. I was too scared. It took months before I finally introduced myself. Every time I thought about doing it, I was filled with fear that the person might not like me or might reject me. It was just easier to not even try. I may have still been lonely, isolated and bored, but at least I had not been rejected. I still struggle with that on a relationship level. It is just very hard for me to develop new relationships. Sadly, of course, that struggle causes some people to think I'm arrogant or cliquish. Regarding evangelism, it means if folks haven't shown up at our assemblies or classes, I haven't done much work. For that I apologize because that is part of my work and I have let that slide hoping sooner or later we would just start having more guests.

I've been thinking about this a lot lately, especially with our Gospel Meeting and Fall Focus beginning next Sunday. As I considered this and studied my Bible about it, I came across a very convicting passage that I have read dozens of times in the past but not allowed to really impact me. **I Corinthians 9:19-23** says Paul became all things to all people that he might by all means win more souls. Let's look at this passage to see why Paul was such an ardent worker in saving souls and see how we can help each other get better at this and through that work, bring more people to Jesus Christ.

Discussion:

- I. We must see the gospel as good news.
 - A. Paul summarized this entire paragraph by saying, "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings" (**I Corinthians 9:23**, ESV). Everything Paul did was for the sake of the "gospel." We have used that word so long it has become a specialized word for us. We just think of the gospel as the message from the Bible. "Gospel" translates the Greek word "euaggellion" which meant "good news."
 - B. Let me ask you what do you do when you receive good news? Do you hang on to it or do you pass it on? I remember the night Wanda Barnes came in with ultrasound pictures of two babies. Just last week Allan and Karla Walker came in with a photo album to share their good news. If we are going to share the gospel, we have to see it as good news.
 - C. Sadly, I think one of the reasons we don't often share is because we don't actually see it as good news. We see it as a list of commands and restraints we are certain people won't want to

hear. We do not see the gospel as the good news of freedom in Christ, but as slavery and bondage. We need to see the gospel as it is presented in **Romans 6:16-23**. The gospel is the message by which we are freed from our sins and freed from our guilt. The gospel is the message by which we gain salvation and eternal life.

- D. Do we see how the gospel has freed us? Can we see how it will free others? We need to see it not as something we have to do to be saved, but something we get to participate in so we can be saved even though we don't deserve it. As the ESV puts it, sharing in the gospel is a blessing. We need to see that blessing.

II. We must see lost people as lost.

- A. In **I Corinthians 9:19**, Paul said he was doing all this that he might "win more of them" (ESV). Then in **I Corinthians 9:22**, he said he was doing this so that he might "save some" (ESV). When Paul looked out at the world, he saw lost people. He saw people that needed saving. He saw dying people who needed life (**Ephesians 2:1-3**).
- B. Paul saw people who were drowning and he had the life preserver to throw them. What good would it do, however, if Paul was walking around on the boat, looking at the sky and never looking in to the water to see the drowning people? We need to see the folk we come in contact with, whether neighbors, family, friends, co-workers, classmates as folks who need the good news we have to share because right now they are drowning in the bad news of their sins.
- C. The story of the apostles and the Samaritan woman at the well always stands out to me about this (**John 4**). The apostles went into the same town as the Samaritan woman. When the apostles came out of Sychar, no one followed them. When the woman came back she brought most of the town with her. What was the difference? The apostles were so caught up in buying food, they didn't see people who needed the Savior. This woman, so enamored with Jesus, saw nothing but people who needed to meet Him.
- D. What do we see? People who are selling us things? Buying things? Friends, neighbors, co-workers? Do we see annoyances? Or do we see people who are lost and need to meet Jesus?

III. We must see ourselves as servants to the lost.

- A. Paul began this paragraph by saying, "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all" (**I Corinthians 9:19**, ESV). This may be what makes this so tough. When I see lost people, I need to see myself as their servant. When I see lost people, I am no longer my own master; they are the masters.
- B. Being a servant means sacrifice. Let's face it, actually trying to help the lost is going to take time. That means some time I might have spent doing something I wanted to do gets sacrificed. We find time to work. We find time for sports. We find time for television. We find time to read. We need to find time to save the lost. Working on saving the lost may even mean sacrificing money. It might mean sacrificing income when we spend some nights teaching instead of working an extra job. It might mean we have to spend money, especially if we have to travel in a car with today's gas prices. It might mean giving up an evening to go visit folks, knock doors or have a study.
- C. We may have to sacrifice some of our liberties. That was Paul's main point in this text. He had the liberty to eat meats, but if he were trying to win Jews and those under the Law, he would sacrifice his liberty. Consider the profound and amazing sacrifice of Timothy in **Acts 16:3**. For the sake of winning those under the law, he underwent circumcision. What a sacrifice.
- D. If we are going to save the lost and share in the blessings of the gospel with them, we are going to have to quit demanding our own rights, quit taking all our time to pursue our desires and our wants and start looking out for what is best for others. We must become the servant.

IV. We must get out of our comfort zone.

- A. Being a servant and sacrificing also goes in another direction. Sometimes we have to make an emotional sacrifice. We have to push ourselves to get out of our comfort zone. In **I Corinthians 9:21**, Paul said he became as one outside the law, to be able to help those outside the law. Think about something here. Can you imagine having been brought up as a Jew under the Law to view pork as unclean and disgusting. The smell would be almost nauseating as the grease

fried and splattered. When you saw the sausage swimming in grease, it might even make you physically ill. At some point, Paul had to choke down his first piece of pork when he went to eat among Gentiles. Don't you know that was outside his comfort zone.

- B. For me, getting outside my comfort zone is going to mean paying attention to the people around me and striking up conversations. It is going to mean reaching out to neighbors. It is going to mean knocking doors. It is going to mean working to turn regular conversations into something spiritual. As I said in the beginning of this lesson, that doesn't come naturally for me. What is your comfort zone? Are you comfortable inviting someone to the assemblies, but not to having them into your home? Maybe you need to make a sacrifice and get outside your comfort zone. Are you uncomfortable having a study in your home or conducting a one-on-one study with someone? Maybe you need to work on getting out of your comfort zone. The fact is, we only grow when we push passed our comforts. We need to put a sign up that reminds us there is no parking in our comfort zone.

V. We must by all means strive to save others.

- A. Paul said, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (**I Corinthians 9:22**, ESV). This was the summary of his previous statements. When with Jews, he became like Jews. When with Gentiles, he became like Gentiles. This didn't mean he was hypocrite or a chameleon. This doesn't mean acting like you support Obama when teaching a Democrat and then acting like you support McCain when teaching a Republican. This didn't mean violating God's law to impress non-Christians. This means acting in ways God allows and that allows the one you are trying to teach to be comfortable. That means if he invited Gentiles over for dinner, he might have sausage pizza. If he invited Jews over, he never would. But, of course, every action needs to be permissible through Christ's law (cf. **I Corinthians 9:21**).
- B. I keep honing in on that phrase, "by all means." Paul didn't have simply one approach up his sleeve. Rather, he viewed everything he did as part of his evangelistic approach. Every visit, every conversation, every situation was part of his evangelism. He was looking in each situation to see how to make it evangelistic. He used his every means. Whether he was in the market, in the synagogue, on Mars Hill, by the river, in the prison, he looked at every situation as an opportunity to bring the spiritual into the conversation and work to save someone. We need to do the same. How many conversations do we have every week without even thinking about how this might be some means to save someone? How many conversations do we have with the same people every week and yet have never thought about using them as a means to save someone. We talk about sports, politics, our kids, our future—can we turn these into conversations that by some means might save someone?
- C. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying we should only ever talk to people with a manipulative end in mind. I'm simply saying we need to use all our means. With everything we do, we should have some thought of how we can use that to save souls. We can use the fact that we are neighbors to develop relationships that might lead to study. We can use a political conversation to talk about God's control. We can use sports to talk about teamwork and being on the winning side, or even to point out that we haven't been able to keep up with sports as much this year because of something spiritual going on.
- D. Finally, do you remember when we were talking about how we find time to work, play sports, PTA, recreation and that we need to find time to save the lost? One of the problems is that we often think saving souls is something we do when we aren't doing any of those other things. Rather, if we recognize Little League puts us in contact with 10 to 15 other families that may need the gospel and strive to use those relationships to get to the spiritual we will be taking time to evangelize. We just have to keep our eyes and ears open and use all means in order to save some.

Conclusion:

In 2008, if the mortality rate stays the same as past years, nearly 7000 people in Williamson, Davidson and Maury counties will die. Every year we hold off, we are losing the opportunity to spread the gospel to more people. Let's not wait any longer. Let's get out of our comfort zone. Dying people depend on us. I'll help you, if you'll help me. Today and this week we have a great opportunity. As we

prepare for our Gospel Meeting and Fall Focus, we have a great opportunity to let people know about something spiritually beneficial for their whole family. I think many people will be interested in working on good deeds. Why not meet with me this afternoon to do some door-knocking? Or take the flyers and postcards yourself and start passing them out to your friends. Far too often, someone comes up with an idea for some work to do. Sadly, before we try, we very often say, "That won't work." More and more ideas are given and more and more we hear, "That'll never work." Sometimes I'm afraid the statement, "That won't work" actually means, "I don't want to work." Let us be workers. Let's get out and do something. Maybe what we do won't work, but at least we'll be working. As the Master pointed out to the man with only one talent, his job was not to do what worked the best. His job was simply to put his talents to work. Let's get started today.