



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 9:15-23

“Paul Under Law and Without Law”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, it's seven thirty. Let's begin with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn to Thee with gratitude and thanksgiving for the confidence we have in the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That accomplished at Calvary's Cross and the unfinished ministry at this very moment as he acts as our representative and our great high priest to pray for us and to be sure, by means of his ministry, that all that he has accomplished on Calvary's cross shall ultimately be ours. We thank Thee that he cannot be frustrated in his designs and purposes. And we thank Thee that by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Thou hast given us confidence in Him. We pray Thy blessing upon the ministry of the word wherever it goes forth, but especially here at Believer's Chapel. We remember those who minister the word of God and especially on Sunday, in this coming Lord's Day, we pray Thy blessing upon the ministry then.

We pray Thy blessing upon the children at the present time and others who are involved in ministry, the ministry in the tape room, and other forms of outreach of the Chapel. We pray for those who work in the office and thank Thee for the important work that they have done and continue to do.

We pray for Pat’s family. We ask Thy blessing upon them. May the faith that she had be a strengthening of them, an encouragement of them. We pray Thy blessing upon the service in which her life is remembered this coming Saturday.

We thank Thee now for the privilege of studying the Scriptures together. And we thank Thee for the ministry of the Apostle Paul being constantly amazed at the wisdom, at the effort, at the insight, and at the broad way in which he carried out the tasks that Thou didst give to him to make him one of the choice saints in the history of the human race. We thank Thee for the Apostle Paul. We thank Thee for his writings. We ask, Lord, that Thou wilt give us understanding as we read and think about them in this hour. For each one present, we pray especially for them and for their families. We commit them to Thee.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Well, we are turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 9 again. And our concluding study will be next Wednesday night, the Lord willing, when we finish this important chapter. This is really an important section that we are looking at tonight, and I think it’s very important that we pay close attention to it. The subject is “Paul Under Law and Paul Without Law,” 1 Corinthians 9, verse 15 through verse 23. And let me begin by reading verse 15. We’ll begin there. The apostle says, and you may remember that he has just defended his right to have compensation. But now in verse 15 he says,

“But I have used none of these things: nor have I written these things, that it should be so done to me.”

That’s very interesting because it reminds me of a lot of things that have happened in the Christian Church in which people have gone out of their way to make the point that they are not appealing for funds. But one occasionally gets the impression that by going out of the way and emphasizing that they are not appealing for funds, there seems

to be an ulterior motive to appeal for them. And the apostle puts that little word in there, I think with that in mind, because he says,

“Nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me, for it would be better for me to die, than that anyone should make my boasting void”

Now, for those of you who have been here as we’ve been going through the epistle, and particularly in chapter 8, you remember that the apostle in 8, 9, and 10 is defending the believer’s freedom, providing it is regulated by love for the weak. Now, the strong he regards as those who realize that by virtue of their salvation, they are delivered from the Law of Moses, and they have liberty to be guided by the Holy Spirit according to the Law of Christ.

But there are those who have their scruples. And one of the scruples that was characteristic of the early church, because of the worship that was carried on in the temples, was that they did not like to eat meat sacrificed to idols because their impression of this was, some of the individuals, that by eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, the heathen idols, they might, in some way, be affected by it. And so there were those who had scruples regarding meat sacrificed to idols.

Paul calls them weak. And the reason he calls them the weak ones is because they’ve not yet realized what it is to be fully delivered from the Mosaic law, the kind of life that they lived before they knew our Lord Jesus Christ. He calls them weak also in Romans chapter 14. And there he says that he’s one of the strong. He identifies himself with those that are strong.

So what he is seeking to do is now to show that, as a Christian believer, we should be willing to make a sacrifice for the weaker brethren and not do things that might wound their conscience. In other words, we shouldn’t take the idea that -- shouldn’t take the position that we’ll just show our freedom and liberty in the strongest of ways, and that

will teach these weak believers what they really have by way of freedom. And the apostle rejects that idea. There it is a tempting thing for believers to take that particular approach because it seems to be that that might be the way by which we could teach people who are weak what it is to be strong, and how they would be delivered from their bondage if they just realized how free they were. But the apostle doesn’t take that approach. I think it’s because his desire to keep from offending the weaker brethren is so strong that he goes out of the way to urge that certain things that we are free to do, we should renounce doing for the sake of offense to our weaker brethren. He finished the 8th chapter, remember, by saying, “Therefore if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat lest I make my brother stumble.” He clearly says it’s perfectly all right to eat meat, but as far as he’s concerned if it involves the stumbling of the brother, he will never eat meat again.

Now, coming to chapter 9, looking for an illustration -- I say looking, I assume, he’s a preacher he probably did look for illustrations, all who preach the word look for illustrations to attempt to make what they hope is their point more clearly; they use illustration. Well, Paul uses his own experience to show how it is possible and, in fact, desirable for us to be willing to go out of our way to keep from offending the weaker brethren and sisters. And he illustrates his point by showing how he responded to the right of support from the church and how he gave it up as an illustration of how a person ought to react when there’s danger he might offend some of those with weaker conscience. In other words, we should be strong enough to be willing to give up things to keep from hurting the conscience of our weaker brethren. To put it another way, what he’s trying to show is that Christian love is triumphant over Christian liberty if it means a damage to the conscience of the weak. So he is doing that.

Now, that makes the apostle appear to be a bit inconsistent. And others who’ve said that what Paul is is really a bit inconsistent. Because he tells us that we are free, and then he tells us that he is, in a sense, not free because he submits himself to this particular

kind of activity, doesn’t take advantage of his freedom, and the result is that people wonder about consistency of the Apostle Paul.

One of the commentators, F.F. Bruce has an interesting little comment with reference to this. Talking about the apostle and inconsistency, he says, “But the consistency which some expect from Paul is that foolish consistency which Emerson called ‘the hobgoblin of little minds adored by little statesmen and philosophers’” -- He should have stopped right there, but he went on and said, -- “‘and divines.’ [Johnson laughs] Because it is true that we who preach the word of God, we frequently find ourselves (well, if not inconsistent at least challenged that we have been inconsistent) He says for such a consistency, little minds will search the life of Paul in vein for his was preeminently a great mind. On the great basic principles of Christianity, he was uncompromising. Where these were not affected, he was the most adaptable of men.”

Now, let me give you one illustration to show what I’m talking about. You may remember when in Acts chapter 16, Luke makes a statement with regards to some activities of the Apostle Paul. He begins the 16th chapter now as the apostle is on his second missionary journey. And he writes, “Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed; but his father was Greek: He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region: for they all knew that his father was Greek.” He was half Jew.

And then let’s take -- have that in mind and then we turn over to a passage like Galatians and chapter 2 where the apostle says these things, “Then after fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and I also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to

be circumcised: And this occurred because false brethren secretly brought in, who came in by stealth, to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.”

Well, why did he circumcise Timothy and why did he refuse to circumcise Titus? So far as the act itself is concerned, he says in another place, in fact in another place in Galatians, circumcision is really nothing. It’s really the keeping of the Commandments of God that’s the important thing. Circumcision is nothing. Now, he means that of course since the time of Christ and the cross. But nevertheless he says that.

Now, why does he say that he will not circumcise, and then he himself does it? And you can understand how people who may not understand Paul very well would call him inconsistent. But it might be the hobgoblin of little minds adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines, because divines particularly criticize the apostle for inconsistency.

The reason, of course, is that in the case of Timothy, it was in order that he might have an opening in the ministry of the word of God where there was no debate over the necessity of circumcision for salvation. But in the Galatians’ letter, he writes with reference to those whose principal point was, if we are going to have full salvation, we need not simply to believe in Jesus Christ, but we need to complete our salvation by undergoing the rite of circumcision. And that very fact of course negated the doctrine of justification by grace apart from works. And so in the case of these brethren, Paul was adamant in not circumcising Titus. In the case of Timothy, it didn’t make any difference with them, and it opened the door for him and the apostle, as we shall read here, is very concerned to have the open door.

Fowlkes Jackson, one of the great students, historical student of the Book of Acts, has said something of the same thing. He says “This charge of consistency is a delight to men of limited intelligence who desire someone whom they can understand and will always say exactly what they expect of him. As they cannot find such a man in Paul, his

utterance is often appeared to them to be illogical. But this is not because he is really inconsistent, for no one held to great principles more consistently. But because of his exceptional breadth of view and his power of seeing that there is more than one side to every question.” I don’t know whether there is more than one side to every question, but there certainly is more than one side to many of the questions.

Now, notice also in this passage, I’m going to read it ultimately, but we are not coming to it quite yet. In verse 22, he says,

“To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some.”

All things to all men, is not this a weakness? If we speak of someone who is all things to all men, we generally say such a person has no conviction at all. He’s all things to all men. Well, we’ll listen to what the apostle has to say. And beginning here in verse 15 now, he has said he has all of these rights and he set them forth, we studied them last week, all of the rights for pay from the saints in support of his ministry. He defends that as being proper in a number of different ways. We need not go over them again.

But in verse 15 now, here he says the great text here is very emphatic, *ego de*; “but I.” You know, in the Greek language -- you’ll understand this whether you have any Greek or not -- but in the Greek language it is not necessary to use a personal pronoun in many cases. And often when the personal pronoun is used the reason it is used is just because there is a bit of emphasis on it. It’s almost as if you and I were writing this and we might underline “but I” because he’s contrasting himself with other ministers of the word of God. “But I have used none of these things.” In other words, he’s contrasting his concern with his privilege. He’s concerned for people, and he doesn’t want them to think of him as a person who is out for their money, although he has the privilege of support for them. “I have used none of these things.” It’s very interesting that he uses

the tense here that suggests the permanence of this state of renunciation. In other words, he evidently made a decision which he carried out through all of his ministry. It wasn’t just on the spur of the moment or in a particular situation, but he determined for his ministry as a whole that he would use none of these things. Now, that expression that he does not use any of these things is used above in one of the verses. And there of course, he uses it in what might be called -- it’s another tense that suggests an event, but this is something that suggests a permanent state of renunciation that characterizes Paul.

Now, I didn’t read a number of the passages in which he refers to the fact that he worked while he preached the gospel. We saw back in chapter 4, verse 12, the apostle had stated, “And we labor working with our own hands.” So even there he reminds them of the fact that he wasn’t like so many of us preachers who were out on a salary from the saints. Rather, he feels it’s his calling to do the ministry of the word of God free of charge. He will say, he makes the gospel free of charge. In chapter 18 in verse 3 of the Book of Acts, we read, “So because he was of the same trade. He stayed with them and worked, for by occupation they were tent makers.”

In chapter 20 in verse 34 of the Book of Acts, we read, “Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities and for those who were with me.” So the apostle tells the Ephesian elders that when he labored in their midst, he not only provided for himself, but he provided for others who were with him.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 in verse 9 to the Corinthians, he reminds them of this, too. I’d like to read these verses because I think it’s important to get something of the spirit of the great apostle. In verse 9 of chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians, he says, “And when I was present with you and was in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked, the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything, I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.” In chapter 12 in verse 13, he says, “For such” -- well, I was reading chapter 11 -- verse 13 of chapter 12, he says, “For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome

to you.” And then this little piece of sarcasm, I guess, “Forgive me this wrong,” he says. So he was a human person, “Forgive me this wrong, I didn’t take your money.”

I don’t need to read anymore, but if you want to read 1 Thessalonians, in that book he says the same thing. In 2 Thessalonians he says it, also. But in verse 12 here, “If others are partakers of this right over you or want not even we more, nevertheless we have not used this right. But endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.” So you cannot help but admire the great apostle for making this decision, because it was something he could have asked from them, but he’s trying to show them that it’s important to be sacrificial if there is a spiritual principle involved. And there was a spiritual principle involved. In fact, he puts this very, very strongly.

Notice what he says in verse 15 again, “But I have used none of these things nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me. For it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.” I wish it were possible for all of you to read Greek, because I think you would see an even greater forcefulness in what the apostle is talking about. His language here really breaks down under the stress of the emotion that he feels. Because he starts out with one kind of construction in which he would expect him to finish it in a grammatical sentence and the same kind of construction, but in the midst of it he stops and starts another sentence. Like I should say, try to make up something on the spur of the moment, I don’t know whether I can do this or not. But I have been watching the Rangers, and I am confident that they will become a strong team, and no one will be able to handle the Rangers by the end of the season.

Now, that’s not very good, do something right on the spur of the moment, but that’s precisely what he’s done. What he actually has done is something like this, “It would be better for me to die than that,” instead of finishing it that way, “It’s better for me to die. No one shall make void my boasting.” It’s a separate little sentence that he inserts there contrary to the grammar of the sentence. It’s called anacoluthon. Now, anacoluthon is an expression, a grammatical expression that comes from the Greek word

that means “to follow.” An anacoluthon is something that doesn’t follow I, *koloutheo*, does not follow. And so it’s a grammatical irregularity. But their grammatical irregularity is so obvious that it makes the emotion that the apostle feels that much stronger to see him in a sense violate grammatical rules to get over the point, “No one is going to make my boasting void.”

Now then, one might ask the question, why does he make a decision like this? Why does he determine that he’s not going to take any money from anyone when it is his right? And you not only know it’s his right, he’s already set it forth in doctrinal form with four or five reasons. We went through them last week.

What is his design? What’s his purpose? Well, in verse 16 through 19 he says, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge.” That’s emphatic incidentally in the original text. “Without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win the more.”

James Moffat, who is the one who is responsible for the well-known Moffat translation which was widely used for several generations, says with reference to this that the apostle’s reward is that he -- or rather his pay, he says his pay is that he will do it without pay. And that’s what he regards as his great goal. Notice in verse 16 he says, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me.” His ministry is not a ministry to which he has been given the privilege of voluntarily responding. The Lord did not say to Paul, “Paul, I’d like for you to preach the word for me, and what do you think about it?” It wasn’t like that with Paul. You may remember he was on his way to persecute the saints on the Damascus Road, and as he puts it in Philippians, “I was apprehended,” I was seized, in fact, it’s the word that is used of Dallas

Cowboy, halfbacks, and linebackers when they meet a running back of the opposite team and bring them down to the ground with a tackle. That’s precisely the word that is used, to bring them down. So he regards himself as being whole-heartedly devoted to the persecution of the saints when our Lord apprehended him, brought him to the ground, and transformed him. Well, there was no meaningful meeting with the Lord in which the apostle was given the opportunity to respond of free will. So his ministry issues from the necessity, not from free will decision. He has no choice. He cannot but preach.

As he regards it, “If I preach the gospel I have nothing to boast of necessity is laid upon me, yes woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” Verse 17 he describes it this way, “If against my will I have been entrusted with a stewardship.” Stewards were well-known in the ancient Roman world. Many of the stewards or -- that’s the word that is used here stewardship -- many of these stewards were slaves. Or if they weren’t slaves, they had been slaves and were free men. And so consequently, they knew what it was to be a servant of the ruler of the land, and individuals who really didn’t have a whole lot of free will either. So when he refers to the fact that he has been entrusted with a stewardship. I like it that he says also in verse 19, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win the more.” And the fact that he calls himself a servant is reminiscent of the fact that our Lord Jesus uses that word of himself, if you’ll remember, because he speaks of himself as the servant of Jehovah, the son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister or to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

So stewardship, now the slaves received no recompense. They had to work. And our Lord evidently regarded Paul that way, as a person who had laid upon him by the Lord himself, a necessity to preach the gospel and Paul regards that as true of him, too. “What is my reward then?” he asks in verse 18. Well, his reward is to preach without charge. And that’s emphatic as I mentioned, to make the gospel free of charge. Now, the principle that lies back of this, of course, is I have freedom to receive pay from the

church. But the freedom that I have, I have renounced for the sake of the carrying out of the ministry that the Lord has given to me. And so he preaches the gospel free of charge.

The apostle was not like so many of the other apostles. When our Lord passed by the receipt of custom, Matthew was there and he said simply, “follow me,” and Matthew got up and followed him. Almost all of the other apostles were what we would call volunteers. Our Lord gave a call but they could respond or not respond, so far as we know. We know of course, I’m not talking about Calvinistic theology, aren’t you happy? [Laughter] I don’t like to burden you too much with truth. But anyway, in the case of those men, they were largely volunteers. But in the case of Paul, no, this is necessity laid upon him. He’s out moving toward a goal with all of the force of Saul the Pharisee and suddenly, he’s turned completely around and now his life has become entirely different. So in the case of the Apostle Paul, it was a matter of compulsion. In the case of Matthew, well, it was the Lord constraining ministry to him.

Dr. Ironside, or someone -- no, it wasn’t Ironside. One of them made a statement about an old preacher who said to a young man who was contemplating the ministry. He gave him this advice; don’t enter the ministry if you can help it. Well, I think that is pretty good advice, because a person who is going to be involved in the ministry of the word of God should have a strong sense of the calling of the Lord God and feel that he would be very unhappy if he did not give himself to the ministry of the word of God. But it’s still not like Paul’s compulsion on the Damascus Road.

Now, we go into a part of the details of the apostle’s mode of ministry that is very interesting. He has been talking about the negative side of things, and now he’s going to talk about the positive. And what he is going to stress is flexibility in ministry. He’s not going to say flexibility and moral principles. There was no flexibility in moral principles with the Apostle Paul, but there is flexibility in the mode of one’s ministry. Now, here in verse 20 through 23 are these most interesting words. He said he was free from all men, but he’d made himself a servant to all. And now in verse 20, “And to the Jews, I became

as a Jew that I might win Jews. To those who are under the law, as under the law that I might win those who are under the law.” Now, it might seem that that’s repetitious because he mentions Jew and then mentions those who are under law, but perhaps, probably, the apostle is talking about Proselytes. In the first case, he says to the Jews,

“I became as a Jew that I might win the Jews. To those who are under the law (as Proselytes), I became as under the law that I might win those who are under the law. To those who are without law, (clearly Gentiles or Pagans), as without law not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became as weak that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some. Now, this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.”

There are some very interesting things in this section. He has said here in verse 20, “And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews to those who are under the law as under the law that I might win those who are under the law.” How could Paul become a Jew? Paul was a Jew. How can a Jew become a Jew? Has that ever puzzled you? Why does a Jew say to the Jews, I became as a Jew. He was a Jew. In what sense then could Paul become a Jew?

Now, there is no doubt of course that he was a Jew. I don’t guess anyone in this room would have any question about it. In Chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians verse 22, he says, “Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they seed of Abraham? so am I.” How could a man who is a Hebrew, an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham say I became a Jew? Or what is it -- Philippians chapter 3 in verse 5 the apostle writes, “Circumcise the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews concerning the law of Pharisees.” How is it possible then for a man who is a Jew, an Israelite, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, to become a Jew? Well, it’s impossible if

something has not happened between the time he was born and the time he states this. What could it be? Well, he became a Christian. That’s why. He became a Christian. He became a member of the family of God possessed of the promises of Christians of the Christian church.

But he says in carrying out his ministry to the Jews, “I became as a Jew.” In other words, this man who is free from the Mosaic Law put himself back under the law for people who were in bondage to that law as he says that he might win them to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So when he says, “I became as a Jew,” well, he means that he has been freed. But now for the sake of winning them, he’s willing to put himself under the Law of Moses for the gospel’s sake. Not for the bondage that being under the law meant to him, but for the gospel’s sake.

In verse 20 he says to those under the law that, “To the Jew I became as a Jew that I might win Jews. To those who are under the law, as under the law.” How could he say -- why should he say he came to be under the law? Well, being a Hebrew, he was under the law. But now having been freed from the law, he says, “In order to give the gospel to the particular Gentiles with whom he comes in contact, he is willing to live like a Jew and he’s willing to put himself under the Mosaic Law. Why? Because a Christian man is the most free of all men. He may take a vow, as he does. He may circumcise one man, not order another person circumcised if the issue back of it touches the freedom of the gospel. So he’s a free man as he says, “Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant of all that I may win the more.”

H.A. Ironside has a very good comment concerning this. I’d like to read it. It’s something of what I’ve been saying, although, I confess, I didn’t get what he is talking about although I appreciate what he has said. He said verse 21 -- that’s the verse, “To those who are without law, as without law, not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ that I might win those who are without law.” Verse 21 is very

interesting and should be of help to many who may not quite understand the Christian’s relation to the law. Reading the latter part of the verse 20, “To them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law, to them that are without law, as without law.” Here we have two classes of men. There are those that are under the law. They are the Jews, or in our day, any to whom the Law of God has come. But here is the other class, to them that are without law as without law. That is the Gentile nations, the Pagan nations. They’ve never heard of the Law of God.

If Paul himself were under the law as some Christians think a believer is, he would not say I became as under the law. I came to be under the law. Where was Paul? And Ironside says he was not under the law, nor was he without law. He was neither subject to some legal ritual nor was he lawless. Where did he stand? Between the two. Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ. He says as it were, I’m not under the Law of Moses, neither am I lawless, but I am under the law to God being legitimately subject to Christ.

And Ironside says, “Do you see the place of the believer, neither under law nor without law, but legitimately subject to Christ and where has Christ expressed his mind for me? Well, Ironside said, he’s expressed his mind for me in the four gospels and in the epistles of the New Testament. You probably know that the apostle does make reference to the law of Christ in Galatians chapter 6 in verse 1. I’m not sure really that this is precisely what he was talking about, but it could be. He says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such in one in the spirit of meekness lest -- considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfilled the law of Christ.” There may be some reference there because what Paul is doing in a sense is bearing a burden for the sake of the weak.

But, nevertheless, what Paul is saying is he’s not under the law, but for the sake of the gospel, he’s willing to put himself under the law in the case for the Jewish people. For the Gentiles, he’s willing to act as if he’s not under the law for them in order to win

them. In other words, there is an adaptability in the ministry of the apostle, but not an adaptability in moral principles. And that’s why he says, “Not without law toward God, but under law toward Christ.” So the apostle is adaptable. Doesn’t violate any moral principles. At the same time, he’s clear on the fact that he is free from the Mosaic Law because believers are not under law but under grace as he says in Romans chapter 6 and 7, 2 Corinthians chapter 3, all of those great passages in which the apostle deals with the question of whether we are under law or not.

I like this little expression in verse 21, “To those who are without law as without law, not being without law toward God, but under the law of Christ.” Now, in verse 20, I didn’t read a clause -- probably most of you, if you have a New American Standard Bible, I didn’t look at the New American Standard Bible. I’m going to ask you a question about it because I didn’t bother to look at it. I was doing my studying from the Greek text, and so I didn’t look at the translations. But in verse 20 my text says, “And to the Jews, I became as a Jew that I might win Jews to those who are under the law as under the law.” Now, probably the genuine text of the Greek New Testament that the apostle wrote these words are added. I’m reading the New King James version, which I have been using for reading purposes and preaching purposes in this class as I’ve explained to you before, not because I think it’s the greatest translation but I was doing some work in connection with it and had to read it a good bit.

But in this particular place, is a little clause and it’s this, “Though not being myself under law.” How many of you have that text in your Bible you’re looking at? Now, those of you that have the King James Version, it’s not there. But those who have the New American Standard Bible, probably the NIV has it, I didn’t read the NIV.

What about it Howard, does it have it? Verse, verse.

[Audience member] I don’t have the NIV.

[Dr. Johnson] You don’t have the NIV? Have you apostatized? [Laughter] He usually -- well he was for a while reading it quite a bit. Does anyone have the New International Version? Yes. Would someone read that? Can you read it out loud?

[Audience member reading – Inaudible]

[Dr. Johnson] I don’t think I heard that too well.

[Audience member – inaudible]

[Dr. Johnson] Yeah, that’s the way it is. Alright. That it should be in there because the New International Version would have something like it and I’m glad, I just didn’t quite hear it. I have a handicap. It’s listening to ladies. [Laughter] Quit laughing, Martha. [Laughter] No, it’s really my hearing. I always think of Winston Churchill who was listening to some speaker speak, and he was going on and people looked over Mr. Churchill and a man in the audience was listening to the speaker and Churchill looked off at him and the man was turning of his hearing aid. And Churchill afterwards said, “He was taking advantage of a natural infirmity.” [Laughter] Dr. Chafer used to do that in seminary all the time. He would introduce the speaker to go, and five or ten minutes later, you would see Dr. Chafer turning his earpiece off. I don’t think he was turning it up louder. You could tell by the way he looked that he was just turning it off a little bit. It was bothering him what he was hearing.

Anyway, “Though not being myself under the law.” Notice that statement, “Though not being myself under the law.” There’s no question that the law that he’s talking about is the Law of Moses. I don’t know of any commentator who would say this is not the Law of Moses. But he says, “Though not being myself under the law.” But for the sake of the gospel, he’s willing to live under the law with the Proselytes, to live as a Jew which would involve living under the law for the Jewish people. In other words, he’s surrendering some of the freedom that he has for the love of the gospel, and for those who may respond, and for also the weak consciences of some of the brothers or sisters who thought that they ought to be under the Law of Moses.

I feel -- most of you know that I love Reformed theology. This is to my mind one of the serious weaknesses of Reformed theology. It’s not in every Reformed person but of some that unfortunately many of the saints to whom they preach are put under the law. And the result is the kind of congregation that reflects that. Now, I don’t need to go into it. I’m sure that probably many of you understand what I’m talking about. But I think it is very important. I think the apostle thought it was very important and statements such as this as well as those other chapters we are talking about to me settles the question. That’s not the major point here, so we’ll drop it with that. “Though not being myself under the law.”

Verse 21, “Then to those who are without law is without law, not being without law toward God, but under the law toward Christ that I might win those who are under the law.” There is a rigid limit to Paul’s flexibility. And the rigid limit to Paul’s flexibility is the moral principles of the word of God. He will not deviate from the moral principles of the word of God, the kind of morality that is found expressed in the Ten Commandments. Now, that’s why the New Testament writers feel no problem at all in citing the Old Testament law for the moral principles that are found within it, even citing the Ten Commandments. So the idea that a Christian, because he is not under the law, does not have to hold to the moral principles of the word of God, is just as erroneous as the person who feels he is under the Mosaic Law as his guide in the Christian life. “Not being without law toward God and Christ.” That’s the limit of the flexibility of the apostle.

Well, let me conclude. The apostle’s principle is that of adaptability out of love. It’s not the end justifying the means. F.F. Bruce has another word with reference to this, and I think it’s worth citing. He says with reference to the statement, “I have become all things to all men.” He says, “This adaptability and versatility probably appeared as inconsistency to Paul’s critics. Even today when a religious leader is said to be all things to all men, it’s more likely to be in blame than in praise.” And then he goes on to repeat

again what Emerson -- Ralph Waldo Emerson said with regard to the hobgoblin -- I want to say goblet -- hobgoblin of little minds adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. So the principle then of all things to all men is to be understood in context. It’s not the kind of thing that is found in the Christian church today. A man may feel free in his preaching in some churches to preach liberalism, preach conservatism.

Let me tell you something. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon, lest the uncircumcised Phillistines of another seminary should hear, but one of the graduates of Dallas Seminary was down -- well, it’s a little city in Texas -- candidating. And the elders were quizzing him regarding the word of God. They wanted to know that he really believed in sovereign grace, is what they really wanted to know. And so they asked him giving him a couple of texts that seemed to them to teach sovereign grace. And so they put the question to him.

And he said, “Well, there are -- with reference to sovereign grace, there are some texts in the Bible that seem to preach it and then there are other texts that seem to avoid it.”

And they said, “Well, what about you? What you do when you come to these texts?”

He said, “I preach it whatever way the text seems to point.”

And they decided he was not the man for them. If he should preach it this way if the text seemed to go that way and he’ll preach it another way if the text seemed to go that way when they were contradictory things.

The apostle is not like that. Not all things to all men. You’ll notice the apostle when he talks about what he became, “To those who are without the law as without the law.” He doesn’t have the kind of freedom to say anything other than to the Jew, I became a Jew. To the Gentiles, I became Gentile. “We couldn’t possibly imagine him saying,” Don Carson says, “to the gossip, I became a gossip, and to the adulterer, I became an adulterer.” It’s the moral principle that is important to him. There are some

things that fit within his freedom; there are other things that do not. And those things that have to do with the moral principles, they do not fit in the apostle’s Christian theology. He stands firm on moral principles. But so far as mode of preaching the word of God, he is free.

Now, he speaks of his motive. I’ll just emphasize this about three more minutes now. I’ll just emphasize this, and then I think I will stop. Are you happy?

Verse 19, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win.” The word is gain really, to gain the more.

And then in verse 20, “And to the Jews I became as a Jew that I might *gain* Jews. To those who are under the law is under the law that I might *gain* those who are under the law,” three times.

Verse 21, “To those who are without the law is without law not being without law toward God, but under the law toward Christ that I might *gain* those who are without law,” four times.

Verse 22, “To the weak I became as weak that I might *gain* the weak. I have become all things to all men that I might by all means *save* some.”

So, as I count that up, five times he says, his goal is to gain, to win. And if you want to know what winning is, it’s not getting them to join the church. It’s that they may be saved. The last statement saved, *sozo*, explains the *kerdaino*, which is the verb that means to gain. So gain, win; gain means save. That’s his motive. I guess the supreme example of the person who was willing to sacrifice some privileges for others is our Lord’s own ministry.

And I’ll just close by reading this. Romans 15, verse 3, “For even Christ did not please himself; but as it is written, The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” So my Christian friends, there are times when it’s important for you as a Christian to forego your privileges in order to minister to those who have need. May God give us grace to do that. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

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[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous instructive words from the Apostle Paul. Help us, Lord, truly as he to put the interest of our great triune God first to be willing to give up what may be our right for the benefit of others among our fellow believers and especially among those who do not know our Lord, that they, as the apostle says, might be won also.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.