

All Things to All People

"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." (1 Corinthians 9:22, ESV)

When Paul says he became all things to all people, it is obvious he was not saying he brought in acrobats, trumpets, and elephants to the assembly to attract those Corinthians who might enjoy a circus or a good show. Paul didn't speak to merely entertain those he spoke with: he used whatever faculty he had available to speak the truth to them. Paul understood that some people required a different set of gloves: Jews who still attended Temple worship had to be approached on their own ground, so he acted the part of a good Jew, though he died to the Law, he walked the steps of the Law to speak with those who were under the Law in their Temple and their synagogues (Ac. 21:26; 13:43). To the Greeks, he went to the Areopagus, Mar's Hill, in Athens and spoke to the philosophers as a spreader of Truth, discussing the nature of the Greek gods and telling the Greeks about the real God, Yahweh, and his son Jesus Christ by comparison. (Ac. 17:17-34). As Paul altered his method when he spoke with others, let us consider our audience, where they are, and adapt to reach them with the Gospel.

When Visitors Come.

Surely, when people from the world attended meetings of the early church, the discussion became more basic, focused on first principles, and people understood what was taught about Jesus. (cf. 1 Cor. 14:23) Do some scriptures seem foreign to believers, especially those of the Old Testament? How must they seem to someone who has never heard the Word of God? If I am being built up learning about the Levitical priesthood, my neighbor who is visiting may still not understand that God is one and the Creator of all things. Indeed, it is challenging for teachers and preachers to (1) edify mature saints, (2) nurture babes in Christ, and (3) teach the Gospel initially to unbelieving souls in the same study, in the same room, at the same time. Part of becoming all things to all people is knowing that some sermons and studies must be done while the church is assembled for the benefit of only the mature, only babes, or only potential believers.

What should I do at that time if I am a mature Christian? Let me sacrifice, as a priest of God, allowing the ones being addressed to receive their nourishment from the Word. Let us realize that it is the people of Christ who become all things to all people of the world. We do not alter the Truth, but ourselves.