



Conducted by
James Gardiner

“ 1 Cor. 9:19-22: How would Paul put this into practice, especially the 22nd verse, and still preach the gospel ? ”

In the verses before those framed in the question, Paul has been re-asserting himself in his position as an apostle and restating the rights to which he was entitled by virtue of his office. Paul reminds his hearers that he was not the recipient of an attractive salary for his preaching of the gospel. He was not on the “ Gravy Train ” (as I believe it is termed in some quarters) but rather he sustained himself by honest labour as a tentmaker. As of right he could have required his brethren to support him financially, and he uses some six arguments to reinforce such a contention: (1) what soldier in the army ever served at his own expense ? (2) who plants a vineyard and is not allowed to eat of the fruit thereof ? (3) who feeds a flock and eats not of the milk thereof ? (4) the law of Moses teaches the principle (Deut. 25:4) “ Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn ” (and God does not legislate for oxen and forget men); (5) they that minister in sacred things [O.T. priests] eat of the things of the temple (Num.

18:8-13; Deut. 8:1); and (6) Christ himself ordained that they who proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7).

In verse 15 of this chapter Paul assures us that he is not reiterating these facts so that the Corinthians might thereby feel obliged to support him, for he did not intend to accept any payment whatever, or to avail himself of his right to being sustained by them materially. Indeed in this verse he says he would rather die than do so, because were he to insist upon his right he would lose his "reward." His reward (or glorying joy) was not so much in the actual preaching of the gospel (for he had no option—it was his necessary stewardship) but rather so that he could have joy (or glory) in the fact that he preached the gospel *free of charge* to anyone. Though entitled to wages he much preferred to support himself by his own labour and so be chargeable to no one. If Paul lived today many would tell him that he would accomplish more by being a "full-time" man, but Paul seemed quite satisfied with what he was doing.

This then brings us to verse 19 and creates the atmosphere for a study of the verses suggested by the questioner. "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." Paul was a free man, not legally bound to any man or bound by any sense of obligations because of financial support. So often nowadays it seems that when a man preaches for a salary he ceases, in some instances, to be an entirely free agent. Paul, then, although answerable to no man placed himself, of his own volition, in a state of subserviency to all. He shows why he pursued his policy of self-denial, and why he relinquished all his material rights—that he might gain more souls. These additional disciples he made meant more to him than his hire. Presumably Paul's attitude of self-sacrifice won the respect and confidence of the people, and they would know his motives certainly were not mercenary.

" All Things To All Men "

V20: " And to the Jews I became as a Jew that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law."

We notice firstly that Paul says he became *as a Jew*: he does not say he became a Jew. Nationally Paul *was* a Jew of course, but he was now a citizen in the kingdom of God and, as such, was a member of a body which recognised no racial distinctions—neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female. The questioner wonders how Paul put this into practice and still preached the gospel—it being supposed presumably that to do the former meant compromising the latter. In the N.T. we have a few illustrations, I think, of how Paul put this policy into practice. Paul observed the Jewish distinction as to meat (chapter 8:13 of this epistle), performed their rites as to vows (Acts 21:26), honoured their feasts (Acts 20:16), classed himself among their Pharisees (Acts 23:6), and even had circumcision administered (Acts 12:3; Gal. 2:3-5). These were, apparently, innocent concessions to, and harmless compliances with, the law in deference to the Jews. Such things, e.g. circumcision, avail nothing one way or the other, but were customs and ceremonies not repugnant to Christianity. Paul's reason for drawing a seeming distinction between "Jews" and "those under the law" was probably because he himself was a Jew but not of those who considered themselves as being "under the law" any more.

V21: " To them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without law." He spoke to the Gentiles from a Gentile standpoint as at Athens (Acts 17) and quoted to them their own poets (Acts 17:28). He did not seek to enforce the law of Moses on the Gentiles, as did the Jews, and he refrained from insulting them in their beliefs (Acts 19:37) and dealt gently with their prejudices (Acts 17:30). Although Paul mixed with the Jews in Jerusalem and made harmless concessions to their observances, he rebuked Peter publicly for playing the Jew in Antioch in a matter of serious principle (Gal. 2:11-21).

V22: " To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

Paul does not say he became weak to gain the weak, but that he became *as the weak*. He exercised himself to understand the difficulties of the weak and the causes of their weakness, that he might save some of them. It was not his intention to sit up in his ivory tower, cushioned by space from those struggling with their problems and weaknesses down below, but he descended to be beside them and help them. Paul reminds me of a company director I used to know who was often to be seen on the building site with jacket off, sleeves rolled up, spattered with mud and sweat, helping the labourers with a particularly arduous job. He went back to his plush office, rather muddy and dishevelled, but he took with him the respect and admiration of his men. The apostle was not, therefore, what today would be termed "a manse man," but was always to be found "where the action was," coming to grips with life and people—the Jews, the Gentiles, the weak, the strong, the intellectual, the simple, the rich, the poor.

Matters of Principle

Sometimes these foregoing verses are perverted to represent Paul as an eye-pleaser or time-server for the sake of peace and popularity, running with the hares and the hounds, pleasing everybody, both Jews and Gentiles and avoiding, like some today, all questions of a controversial nature, as though in these verses he is advocating appeasement and compromise. Nothing, of course, could be farther from the truth. Paul loved the truth of Christ more than he loved men or even his brethren. When it comes to compromising the truth Paul's attitude is surely expressed in Rom. 3:4, where he says "Let God be true but every man a liar." In the countless incidentals in life which do not involve any principle of right or wrong Paul disposed himself to be tolerant, and showed the friendly disposition of one vitally interested in the happiness and eternal wellbeing of everyone he met.

Again the foregoing verses are often quoted in support of the proposal that church members should frequent dance halls and public houses in order to meet the men of the world on their ground and at their own level. I suppose that once in a lifetime this crosses our minds as being a reasonable idea, but as we grow older and more experienced we realise how foolish a proposition it really is. To pull a man from the pit, the rescuer must keep his feet on firm and dry ground, and if he jumps down beside the man in the ditch then two will need to be rescued. Paul did not become "as the weak" in that sense, but rather he tailored his mental attitude to meet their needs, and to understand their difficulties, so that he might make them strong.

Surely the crux of the matter is that the apostle legally adapted *himself* to all men in order that he might influence and gain them. He did not adapt *the message* (as some do today) to accommodate all men. He *adapted himself* he did not *adapt the truth*, and this is probably the thought which may have prompted the question. These verses, briefly discussed, should never lead us to suppose that Paul ever impaired the execution of his duty to preach the gospel. "Woe is unto me," said he, "if I preach not the gospel," of Christ. At the end of his days he could also say "I have kept the faith."

Acts 20:27: "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

Please send questions to James R. Gardiner, 88 Davidson Terrace, Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

NOVEMBER 1968

3—Psalm 2	Matthew 22:23-46
10—Isaiah 59	Matthew 23:1-22
17—2 Chron. 24:13-22	Matthew 23:23-39
24—Daniel 9:16-27	Matthew 24:1-31

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The following are the questions covered in our readings for November.

1. The question asked by the Sadducees about the resurrection;
2. The question asked by the lawyer about the law;
3. The question asked by Jesus about the prophecy of David;
4. The questions asked by the disciples about the destruction of the Temple.