

“*Domine, volumus Jesum videre,*” John 12:21.

“*Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,*” Mark 9:24.

1 CORINTHIANS 9

¹⁶You see, if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about, because an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷If I do this as a volunteer, I receive compensation. But if not, I have been entrusted with a responsibility as a steward. ¹⁸What then is my compensation? To present the gospel of Christ free of charge when I preach it, instead of making use of the right I have when I preach the gospel.

¹⁹In fact, although I am free from all, I enslaved myself to all so that I might gain many more. ²⁰To the Jews, I became like a Jew so that I might gain Jews. To those who are under the law, I became like a person under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might gain those who are under the law. ²¹To those who are without the law, I became like a person without the law (though I am not without God’s law but am within the law of Christ) so that I might gain those who are without the law. ²²To the weak, I became weak so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all people so that I may save at least some. ²³And I do everything for the sake of the gospel so that I may share in it along with others.



“Method actors” commit themselves to a role in a way most cannot.

Daniel Day-Lewis is one example of a method actor. In the movie *My Left Foot*, he refused to move from the wheelchair. He did this just to be in character. The set crew had to lift him over obstacles. The actor insisted on spoon-fed meals. After several weeks in the wheelchair he had two broken ribs.

For the movie *Last of the Mohicans*, Day-Lewis went out to the Alabama wilderness to track, hunt, and skin animals. If he didn’t shoot it, he didn’t eat it.

For the movie *Lincoln*, Day-Lewis studied for a year in advance. He stayed in character even when the cameras weren’t rolling, expecting everyone to call him “Mr. President.” Otherwise, Daniel Day-Lewis didn’t answer.

Robin Williams was not as much of a method actor, but certainly a committed one. He once stated that acting means learning to be a chameleon, blending into every situation. This means it's often more than just pretending, but really trying to become.

And so some of the best advice I received as a Christian in my pastoral education was this: Learn to love people sincerely.

Today we learn from Paul, the greatest committed missionary, to do just that—love people sincerely. He did not pretend with people, but he loved them; and he committed to being as much like them in order to share the gospel with them.

THE CHAMELEON OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

1. A gospel witness blends in. Paul says (v19), “*In fact, although I am free from all, I enslaved myself to all so that I might gain many more.*” Someone else's conscience was more important to Paul than his own comfort. Christian freedom in matters of adiaphora opened up a world of Christian love and kept Paul thinking about others.

Paul knew how to meet people where they were. He learned his audience. Then he became like his audience in order to find an opening for the gospel; he would learn to relate to them. Paul would start with what they knew and work to what they needed to know. The goal was to blend in and then get them to believe.

He could navigate the Old Testament Law with the Jews. He could discuss philosophy and culture with the Gentiles. He could relate to the weak of faith with his own weaknesses.

Christians have learned myriads from this simple verse, becoming “*all things to all people.*” We have become chameleons so that, by blending in, we could share the message of Jesus Christ and how the Father was reconciling the world to Himself in the Son. Christians have learned to chat about farming with farmers, art history with art historians, sports with sports fans, family with fathers and mothers. We have gone out to the highways and byways just to sincerely love people and speak what we believe. There is sincerely nothing better for us to speak than the gospel of Jesus Christ, but to get there, we must start somewhere.

Sometimes it simply means we “*rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn*” (Rom. 12:15).

Paul did not necessarily adopt new positions in life. For all of the listed examples he could be to all men – Paul had been them. That is to say: the reason Paul could be all things to all men was that from the start he had been a part of both worlds – Jew as well as Gentile. He didn’t need to learn the Old Testament and Judaism; he had been originally a Benjamite and a Pharisee. He didn’t need to learn the Roman world; he was already a Roman citizen, likely because his father was a freed slave. Paul didn’t need to go live beside a dumpster to learn the life of poverty; he immediately learned poverty and want in his trials as a Christian convert. He authentically was those things.

So God does not call the tone-deaf among us to try and be an opera singer to an opera singer. God does not call the infirm and brittle to be an extreme sports athlete to the extreme sports athletes in your life. God does not call us to use drugs in order to witness to drug users. God is not calling us to “fake it.” In fact, in most studies of millennials, they can smell inauthenticity a mile away. It is important for us to be who we are, yet know our audience.

If we can sincerely love and know our audience, then we can draw on our experiences to really love others. If you can, do authentically meet people where they are at. Learn a little about their battles. Show them that the gospel has a solution to each one.

2. Blend in to really witness the gospel ... and not just to blend in. Don’t forget that Paul was not just carrying out some social experiment. He wasn’t just looking for an Oscar or a Golden Globe at the end of the day. He was looking to serve the highest purpose, to bring God’s Gospel and to “gain” and “save” souls.

Paul did not compromise his goals. He did not just affirm everyone in their current moral code. Paul said (v 16), “*Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.*” The gospel changes people, because it exchanges their burden of sins for a perfect record. They are given a new status with God.

Paul also did not compromise his own faith. For instance, Paul did not consider himself without God’s Law (v21), because it was God’s Law that Jesus died to fulfill for us. The gospel was not that the ends justify the means. He did not fall into sin in order to be like other people. He kept his approach above board.

In Galatians 1:10, Paul wrote, *“Am I now trying to seek the favor of men or God? Or am I striving to please men?”*

We too do not have to sacrifice personal values in order to witness. We are to “change, diminish, and increase” adiaphora “without thoughtlessness or offense,” “in an orderly way,” when it might be “profitable and beneficial” for people (FC.TD.X). Changes should be worthy of the gospel. Once we attempt to sin in order to be like others, we have in fact sacrificed our witness. We have fumbled and lost the message, and we have become an obstacle to the gospel.

2 Peter 3:17, *“Therefore, dear friends, since you already know these things, be on your guard so that you do not fall from your own firm position by being led astray through the error of the wicked.”*

We would think after taking such great pains to become a chameleon Christian, Paul would then be able to say, “I won every soul to Christ along the way.” Instead, Paul says only that he might save some—at least some. Not even Paul could save all.

In fact, not even Jesus delivered a perpetually agreeable message. Many turned away from Him after His ‘Bread of Life’ sermon in John 6. The crowds who waved palm fronds and laid down their cloaks for Him called for His death on Calvary.

The fault is not in the message—not in the Word or sacrament. It is in the sinner, who listens so poorly. The time has come, try as we might, when people do not put up with sound doctrine. They accumulate teachers who will scratch their itching ears and tell them what they want to hear (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3).

The greatest example of a “chameleon” with a sincere, committed love was Jesus Christ for us. He knew His audience and He knew how to help. He put on human flesh like us, so Jesus Himself was for us. He came not to be served but to serve. He blended in and spoke harshly to those who did not want to hear it. He told us wonderful things we did not expect to learn and love. He was the love of God for us. He forgave us. God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. In Him we are acceptable to and accepted by the Father. But in order to win that status for us, the Son became like us ... to live for us, to die for us, to raise us to life with Him, in order to gain us; in Jesus’ name, Amen.