

1 Corinthians 9:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

Analysis

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. Paul introduces his missionary strategy of voluntary enslavement. The Greek eleutheros (έλεύθερος, "free") echoes verse 1; as an apostle, Paul has liberty from human authority and cultural expectations. Yet he chose to become a doulos (δοῦλος, "slave, servant") to everyone. This is not compulsion but strategic self-limitation.

The phrase "gain the more" (Greek kerdainō, κερδαίνω, "win, gain") is repeated five times (v. 19-22), emphasizing Paul's evangelistic purpose. He surrenders freedom to maximize conversions. This is the practical application of chapter 8's theology: the strong limit liberty for the weak. Paul becomes "all things to all men" (v. 22), adapting culturally without compromising doctrinally. This is missional flexibility—refusing to let secondary issues (food, cultural customs, financial support) obstruct the gospel. Paul models what he commands.

Historical Context

In Greco-Roman society, freedom (eleutheria) was prized above nearly all virtues. Slaves dreamed of manumission; citizens defended political liberty; philosophers extolled moral autonomy. Paul's voluntary enslavement was countercultural and shocking—like a freed slave choosing to return to bondage. Yet Christ did the same (Phil 2:6-7), and Paul follows His pattern: freedom expressed through sacrificial service.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's self-enslavement to others demonstrate true Christian freedom?
2. What is the relationship between liberty (v. 1, 19) and voluntary servanthood (v. 19)?
3. How does "gaining the more" shape Paul's missionary strategy and personal choices?

Interlinear Text

Ἐλεύθερος γὰρ ὡν ἐκ πᾶσιν πᾶσιν ἐμαυτὸν
free For though I be from all all myself
G1658 G1063 G5607 G1537 G3956 G3956 G1683

ἐδούλωσα τίνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω.
men yet have I made that G3588 the more G4119 I might gain
G1402 G2443 G2770

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 5:13 (Parallel theme): For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Matthew 18:15 (Parallel theme): Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

1 Corinthians 10:33 (Parallel theme): Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

1 Timothy 4:16 (Parallel theme): Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

2 Timothy 2:10 (Parallel theme): Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Romans 15:2 (Parallel theme): Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

2 Corinthians 4:5 (Parallel theme): For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

Proverbs 11:30 (Parallel theme): The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

Romans 1:14 (Parallel theme): I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

1 Corinthians 9:1 (Parallel theme): Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?