

1 Corinthians 9:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

To them that are without law, as without law, When ministering to Gentiles unfamiliar with Torah, Paul did not impose Jewish customs. He ate with Gentiles (Gal 2:12), ignored kosher laws, and dismissed calendar observances as non-binding (Col 2:16-17). This offended Jewish Christians (Acts 15; Gal 2) but opened gospel access to the nations.

(Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) Crucial qualification: Paul is not antinomian. He is not "lawless" (Greek *anomos*, ἄνομος) before God; he is "en-lawed to Christ" (Greek *ennomos Christou*, ἐννομος Χριστοῦ). Paul lives under Christ's moral authority—the "law of Christ" (Gal 6:2), fulfilled in love (Rom 13:8-10). He is free from Mosaic ceremonial law but bound to Christ's ethical will. This preserves moral accountability while granting cultural flexibility.

Historical Context

Gentile converts came from pagan backgrounds with no knowledge of Torah. Requiring circumcision and kosher laws would have erected insurmountable barriers (Acts 15:10). The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) affirmed that Gentiles need not become culturally Jewish to be saved. Paul applied this principle rigorously, refusing to burden Gentile churches with Jewish ceremonialism while maintaining gospel ethics.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Paul balance freedom from Mosaic law with submission to Christ's law?
2. What is the "law of Christ" that governs believers freed from Torah?
3. How does this verse prevent both legalism (imposing cultural rules) and antinomianism (rejecting moral authority)?

Interlinear Text

τοῖς G3588	ἀνόμους· G459	ὡς G5613	ἀνόμους· G459	μὴ G3361	ὦν G5607
To them that are without law		as	To them that are without law	not	(being)
ἀνόμους· G459	θεῷ G2316	ἀλλ' G235	ἔννομος G1772	Χριστῷ G5547	ἵνα G2443
To them that are without law	to God	but	under the law	to Christ) that
κερδήσω G2770	ἀνόμους· G459				
I might gain	To them that are without law				

Additional Cross-References

Romans 2:12 (Word): For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

Romans 2:14 (Word): For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

Galatians 3:2 (Word): This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

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