

1 Corinthians 9:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: Paul circles back to chapter 8's concern—the "weak" in conscience who fear idol-meat defiles them (8:7-13). Though Paul knows idols are nothing (8:4), he voluntarily limits his freedom to avoid causing the weak to stumble. This is the chapter's central application: Paul practices what he preaches. He is the "strong" who becomes "weak" for others' sake.

I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. This famous statement summarizes Paul's missionary philosophy: maximum cultural flexibility to maximize gospel fruit. "All things to all men" is not doctrinal compromise (Paul anathematizes false gospels, Gal 1:8-9) but cultural adaptability. Paul adjusts secondary matters—language, customs, food, dress—while holding firm on gospel essentials. The goal is clear: "save some" (Greek *sōzō*, σώζω). Paul is willing to endure personal inconvenience, cultural awkwardness, and financial hardship if even a few more are saved.

Historical Context

The Greco-Roman world was radically pluralistic—dozens of ethnicities, languages, religions, and customs coexisted in cities like Corinth. Missionaries had to navigate Jewish synagogues, Greek philosophical schools, Roman civic religion, and mystery

cults. Paul's adaptive strategy allowed him to engage all groups without unnecessary cultural offense, focusing attention on the scandal of the cross itself.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does "all things to all men" apply to cross-cultural missions and contextualized ministry today?
2. What are examples of cultural flexibility versus doctrinal compromise in your own context?
3. How does Paul's goal ("save some") shape priorities in ministry and personal evangelism?

Interlinear Text

γέγονα	τοῖς	ἀσθενεῖς	ώς	ἀσθενεῖς	ἴνα	τοὺς
I am made	G3588	To the weak	as	To the weak	men that	G3588
G1096		G772	G5613	G772	G2443	

ἀσθενεῖς	κερδήσω·	τοῖς	πάντα	γέγονα	τὰ	πάντα
To the weak	I might gain	G3588	all things	I am made	G3588	all things
G772	G2770		G3956	G1096		G3956

ἴνα	πάντως	τινὰς	σώσω
men that	by all means	some	I might
G2443	G3843	G5100	G4982

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 10:33 (Salvation): 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 Corinthians 9:19 (Creation): For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

Romans 15:1 (Parallel theme): We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Romans 11:14 (Salvation): If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

1 Corinthians 8:13 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

Galatians 6:1 (Parallel theme): Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

1 Corinthians 7:16 (Salvation): For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?