**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 CORINTHIANS-016**. **A SERVANT OF MEN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"19. For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 20. And unto 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; 21. 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. 22. 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. 23. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."*

*1 Corinthians 9:19-23*

Paul speaks much of himself, but he is not an egotist. When he says, I do so and so, it is a gracious way of enjoining the same conduct on his readers. He will lay no burden on them which he does not himself carry. The leader who can say Come is not likely to want followers. So, in this section, the Apostle is really enjoining on the Corinthians the conduct which he declares is his own.

The great principle incumbent on all Christians, with a view to the salvation of others, is to go as far as one can without untruthfulness in the direction of finding points of resemblance and contact with those to whom we would commend the Gospel. There is a base counterfeit of this apostolic example, which slurs over distinctive beliefs, and weakly tries to please everybody by differing from nobody. That trimming to catch all winds never gains any. Mr. Facing-both-ways is not a powerful evangelist. The motive of becoming all things to all men must be plainly disinterested, and the assimilation must have love for the souls concerned and eagerness to bring the truth to them, and them to the truth, legibly stamped upon it, or it will be regarded, and rightly so, as mere cowardice or dishonesty. And there must be no stretching the assimilation to the length of either concealing truth or fraternising in evil. Love to my neighbour can never lead to my joining him in wrongdoing.

But, while the limits of this assumption of the colour of our surroundings are plainly marked, there is ample space within these for the exercise of this eminently Christian grace. We must get near people if we would help them. Especially must we identify ourselves with them in sympathy, and seek to multiply points of assimilation, if we would draw them to Jesus Christ. He Himself had to become man that He might gain men, and His servants have to do likewise, in their degree. The old story of the Christian teacher who voluntarily became a slave, that he might tell of Christ to slaves, has in spirit to be repeated by us all.

We can do no good by standing aloof on a height and flinging down the Gospel to the people below. They must feel that we enter into their circumstances, prejudices, ways of thinking, and the like, if our words are to have power. That is true about all Christian teachers, whether of old or young. You must be a boy among boys, and try to show that you enter into the boy's nature, or you may lecture till doomsday and do no good.

Paul instances three cases in which he had acted, and still continued to do so, on this principle. He was a Jew, but after his conversion he had to become a Jew by a distinct act; that is, he had receded so far from his old self, that he, if he had had only himself to think of, would have given up all Jewish observances. But he felt it his duty to conciliate prejudice as far as he could, and so, though he would have fought to the death rather than given countenance to the belief that circumcision was necessary, he had no scruple about circumcising Timothy; and, though he believed that for Christians the whole ancient ritual was abolished, he was quite willing, if it would smooth away the prejudices of the many thousands of Jews who believed, to show, by his participation in the temple worship, that he walked orderly, keeping the law. If he was told You must, his answer could only be I will not; but if it was a question of conciliating, he was ready to go all lengths for that.

The category which he names next is not composed of different persons from the first, but of the same persons regarded from a somewhat different point of view. Them that are under the law describes Jews, not by their race, but by their religion; and Paul was willing to take his place among them, as we have just observed. But he will not do that so as to be misunderstood, wherefore he protests that in doing so he is voluntarily abridging his freedom for a specific purpose. He is not under the law; for the very pith of his view of the Christian's position is that he has nothing to do with that Mosaic law in any of its parts, because Christ has made him free.

The second class to whom in his wide sympathies he is able to assimilate himself, is the opposite of the former--the Gentiles who are without law. He did not preach on Mars Hill as he did in the synagogues. The many-sided Gospel had aspects fitted for the Gentiles who had never heard of Moses, and the many-sided Apostle had links of likeness to the Greek and the barbarian. But here, too, his assimilation of himself to those whom he seeks to win is voluntary; wherefore he protests that he is not without law, though he recognises no longer the obligations of Moses law, for he is under [or, rather, "in"] law to Christ.

The weak are those too scrupulous-conscienced Christians of whom he has been speaking in chapter 8. and whose narrow views he exhorted stronger brethren to respect, and to refrain from doing what they could do without harming their own consciences, lest by doing it they should induce a brother to do the same, whose conscience would prick him for it. That is a lesson needed to-day as much as, or more than, in Paul's time, for the widely different degrees of culture and diversities of condition, training, and associations among Christians now necessarily result in very diverse views of Christian conduct in many matters. The grand principle laid down here should guide us all, both in regard to fellow-Christians and others. Make yourself as like them as you honestly can; restrict yourself of allowable acts, in deference to even narrow prejudices; but let the motive of your assimilating yourself to others be clearly their highest good, that you may gain them, not for yourself but for your Master.

Verse 23 lays down Paul's ruling principle, which both impelled him to become all things to all men, with a view to their salvation, as he has been saying, and urged him to effort and self-discipline, with a view to his own, as he goes on to say. For the Gospel's sake seems to point backward; that I may be a joint partaker thereof points forward. We have not only to preach the Gospel to others, but to live on it and be saved by it ourselves.