

For the Gentiles I Became a Gentile

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 2:12–14

Code: B110914

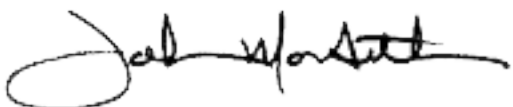
As long as it did not violate God's Word or compromise the gospel, Paul was willing to accommodate himself to his audience. As we noted in the last post, that was certainly true of his Jewish audience. But Paul didn't stop with the Jews. He demonstrated the same heart of sacrifice toward the Gentiles—all for the sake of the gospel.

Going back to the ninth chapter of 1 Corinthians, you read in verse 21, "To those who are without law, [I become] as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law." "Those who are without law" are the Gentiles. Note the qualifier Paul inserted. He specifically stated that he is "*not . . . without the law of God but under the law of Christ.*" He clearly was not saying he became morally lawless to please despisers of true righteousness.

Though he became as "without law" in the ritual or ceremonial sense, he was not living licentiously or behaving unrighteously. He would have no sympathy with *antinomians*—people who believe all law is abolished for Christians. "Without law" is not a reference to the moral law. Paul is not implying that he lived it up just to make the Gentiles admire him. He did not encourage people to think they could become Christians and hang on to a worldly lifestyle. Again, he was talking about the Old Testament ceremonial law. When he ministered to Gentiles, he dropped all his non-moral Jewish traditions. When Paul was with the Gentiles he followed Gentile customs and culture insofar as it did not conflict with the law of Christ. He avoided needlessly offending the Gentiles.

When Paul was in Jerusalem, for example, he followed Jewish religious customs. He observed the feasts and Sabbaths, and he followed Jewish dietary laws. When he went to Antioch, however, he ate with the Gentiles, even though that violated his own tradition and upbringing. Peter came to Antioch and also ate with the Gentiles, until some Judaizers showed up. Then Peter and some others withdrew and held themselves aloof (Galatians 2:12). Paul says, "Even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy" (Galatians 2:13). That was when Paul rebuked Peter to his face in front of others.

Notice why Paul confronted Peter: "I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:14). Paul's reason for becoming all things to all men was not so he could slip the gospel in covertly. On the contrary, it was so he could without hindrance proclaim the truth of the gospel more straightforwardly than ever. He wanted to remove any personal offense, so the offense of the gospel would be the only one. Paul saw Peter's compromise as something that undermined the clarity and the force of the gospel, and that is why he confronted him.



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