

**Great Verses of the Bible**  
**“I Become All Things”**  
**1 Corinthians 9:19-23**  
**September 3, 2023**  
**Pastor John Mars**

This is the day that the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Good morning, Church! I'm going to read a passage of scripture from 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, beginning with verse 19. Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, says, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I become like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I become like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I become like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I become weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all means possible I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." May God bless the reading of His Word.

The Church has one mission, and that is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Don't get distracted! Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I will be in the midst." And I can tell you without hesitation, reservation, or qualification, if two or three are gathered together, Satan will also be in the midst. And there will be diverse opinions, and Satan will use diverse opinions to distract us. One of Satan's greatest tools against the church is distraction. And there are so many distractions, differences of opinion being the most common, because every one of us is right. And every one of us thinks that our opinion is so very important! Did you know there are over 45,000 different Christian denominations? Did you know that? 45,000, because of differing opinions. Did you know that there's over 600 different denominations that call themselves Baptist? There's over 160 with Methodist in the name. And only God knows how many trace their lineage back to Wesleyan theology. In recent years Satan has used the debate about human sexuality to distract, divide, derail, and I would go so far as to say hijack many churches, both ways. And there are many other distractions, as well. I started listing some of the distractions. I was going to use that as part of the sermon today, but I was afraid that I would miss your pet distraction and you would get aggravated with me, and that would be a distraction!

Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Don't get distracted! Distractions have always been a part of the church from the earliest days. The only thing that has changed is the distractions. Paul dealt with multiple distractions in the early church. There were just as many then as there are now. Don't be deceived; the distractions have just changed. I want to mention a couple, just briefly, that Paul dealt with in the church of Corinth. The first distraction was a group called the Judaizers. Now the Judaizers were either Jewish by birth or converted to Judaism. They were people who believed that Jesus was Messiah, but they believed that in order to truly be saved, you must accept Jesus and become Jewish. That meant you had to observe the law; you had to observe the ritual; and if you were male, you had to be circumcised to be saved. They said it was Jesus plus the law. Paul said, "No, no, no! It's Jesus period, not Jesus plus." And then there was a group that said, "You mean we're not under the law anymore but we're under grace, and God likes to forgive sin? Let's give Him something to forgive! Trust God and sin boldly!" And you can just hear Paul going, "No, no! Yes,

we're not under the Jewish law, we're under Jesus' law." And Jesus' law is to "love one another as I have loved you. By this will all people know you are my disciples, by the way you love one another." And loving one another is not just loving y'all, but loving me, too, and loving yourself as Jesus loves you.

And then there's this little problem of the question of whether or not to eat meat sacrificed to idols. I don't know about you, but I haven't faced that one. It's just not something we deal with much in our culture, is it? But it was a real issue then. When we think about sacrificing animals, we think of the Jewish religion. Well, most of the ancient religions contained a component of animal sacrifice. And when we as Westerners think of animal sacrifice, we think about killing the animal, throwing it on a fire, and burning it up. Well, that's just not the way it was. Yes, they did kill the animal ritually, and then they butchered the animal. And they offered select pieces and parts as a burnt offering. And then the priests got their share. And then the worshipers took the remaining parts of the animal, and they would eat that animal or portions of that animal. And if they did not want to eat that animal, they would sell it to the local market. Christians began to ask, "Well, is it okay for us to eat animals that have been sacrificed to idols?" Paul said, "Well, that's debatable. If you think it's wrong, then for you, it is wrong. But if you're like me, and you know that you know that you know that idols are nothing but a figment of somebody's imagination, they are not real, then when you go to the market, don't worry about where that animal came from. Eat it. And if you go to somebody's house, and they serve you meat, don't worry about where it came from. Eat it. But if you go to somebody's house, and they say, 'I sacrificed this to an idol this morning,' don't eat it." You see where it gets a little bit complicated? And then people began to debate about what is optional and what is not optional. You see how this gets pretty complicated? Paul dealt with that in the early church. These debatable things, these distractions, cost the early church and Paul a great deal of time, a lot of heartaches, and a lot of headaches, the same as they do today.

Today is our last in our series of sermons on great passages of the Bible. In our passage today, we find how Paul dealt with all of these distractions. He said, "I have become all things to all people so that by all means I may win a few." The way Paul dealt with these multiple distractions was to keep his mind on the mission, to be singularly focused. His mission was to make disciples of Jesus Christ, of as many people, in as many different ways, as often as he possibly could. He kept his mind on his mission: to make disciples of as many groups as possible. He said, "To the Jews I become like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those having the law I become like those having the law, to win those under the law. To those not having the law I become like those not having the law, to win those that don't have the law. To the weak I become weak, so that I might win the weak. I become all things to all people, so that by all means I may win a few. Our purpose as a church is to make disciples. Don't get distracted!

One of Paul's motivations, something that he thought was not debatable and not negotiable, was an absolute certainty in his mind. He believed that the return of Jesus Christ was imminent. He believed that he would see the return of Christ with power to this world with his own eyes. And for Paul, that opinion of his was not negotiable. Paul was wrong. And if Paul was wrong about his non-negotiable opinion, what do you think the chances are that some of us might possibly be wrong, too, that our opinions might not be correct? I love what Will Rogers said about opinions. He said, "Most of our opinions should be kept behind our own teeth." I like that. There are a lot of opinions out there and a lot of them are wrong, but I am right! Aren't you? Now, I'm going to change

directions on you a little bit, but really, I'm not. It's going to just sound that way for the moment. We'll be right back.

My entire career has been guided by two core values, the first one being: People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. And number two: Trust God like it all depends on God and work like it all depends on you. Now, those I believe to be universal. I believe those two core values apply to all of us, and so I talk about those a great deal. But I have a third core value that you don't hear very often, because this one applies to me. This is mine. This is my ministry. This is what God wants me to do. This is how I conduct myself. This is my responsibility. This is mine. This is not for everybody. I did not say it was right. I did not say it is universal. This is mine. As my nephew used to say, when we tried to take a toy away from him, he would say, "Mine! Mine!" This is mine. Is that clear? Alright, this is mine. About 25 years ago I noticed that our world was becoming more and more and more polarized, more polarized. And every year since then, that polarization has increased. And God showed me that my ministry, mine, my ministry, was to create a bastion of moderate Christianity, wherever I am, in the sea of extremism we live in. My mission is to create a bastion of moderate Christianity in the sea of extremism we live in, wherever I'm at. That is my ministry. Here's what I have observed: We have people that are on the extreme left and people that are on the extreme right, making an awful lot of noise. And most of the rest of us fall into the middle. And what I have found is that people on the extremes don't have much trouble with the people in the middle. They just have trouble with the people at the other extreme. But those of us in the middle can draw people together for the purpose of making disciples of Jesus Christ. We can unite folks. You see, we don't have to agree about everything to make disciples of Christ. Y'all hear me? Our job is to bring people together and make disciples. We catch 'em; we let God clean 'em. One of the most liberating movements in my life, and I call it a movement because it was a period in my life. One of the most liberating movements in my life is when God showed me that it was not my obligation to make Mini-Me's. It wasn't. It's not my obligation to convert people to my way of thinking. I'm not wrong, but I could be.

We don't have to agree, to make disciples. It's not my obligation to convert you to my way of thinking. It is our obligation to make disciples of Jesus Christ. It is our obligation to put our differences aside so that we can make disciples of Christ. I mean, people are entitled to their own stupid opinions! We don't have to agree, to make disciples. Now, y'all listen to me. Agreeing to disagree is one of the unique, beautiful, and intentional aspects of Central United Protestant Church. We were created by some of the most diverse people you'll ever find. We are the church for everybody else. For goodness sakes, folks, when we leave here today, we're going over to the fellowship area. That room is called the Wesley-Calvin Room. You can't get more diverse theologically than those two guys. That is intentional.

Pat mentioned a moment ago in her announcements (boy, that was a lot of announcements. Well, you don't know the half of it!), this is the first Sunday of September. September is when we traditionally kick off our fall programming. And over the next couple of weeks this church is going to become a beehive of activity. There's going to be stuff going on all the time. Some of it you're going to be involved in, some of it you're not. Some of it you're going to know about, some of it you're not. Some of it you're going to like, and some of it you're not. And some of it you're going to disagree with, and some of it you're not. Don't get distracted! Our purpose is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. And guess what? If you make disciples of Jesus Christ, you cannot keep

the disciples from supporting such programs as Martha's Cupboard. If you make disciples of Jesus Christ, you cannot keep them from supporting local missions and foreign missions. If you make disciples of Jesus Christ, you cannot keep them from giving money to support the ministries of the church. If you make disciples of Jesus Christ, you cannot keep them from feeding the hungry. And if you make disciples of Christ, you cannot keep them from ministering with the homeless. Our job is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Don't get distracted! We make disciples; the disciples transform the world. So, Paul said, "The way I keep from getting distracted is I become all things to all people, so that by all means I may win a few." Starting a new church year, September, let us resolve, let us promise one another that we will not allow ourselves to get distracted, that we will keep our mission, our ministry, in mind. And that is to make disciples. Let's pray.

Lord, You know our hearts. You know who we are. And Lord, You know that we are so easily distracted. We so easily forget our purpose, our mission. So, Lord, continually, constantly remind us of who we are and why we are here. In Jesus' name, amen.