

WHY WE MAKE CHANGES

By Terry Jones, July 6, 2008
Christ's Church at Tiffin, Ohio

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

CENTRAL SERMON THEME – Christians give up some of their preferences in order to win others to Christ.

INTRO. - I want to explain why we make changes in the church. I ask you to consider how our preferences influence how we react to changes.

1. Our church background develops our preferences. We are a church of a numerous church backgrounds. Let's take a poll. Clap when I name your church background. Christian Church/Church of Christ. Catholic. Baptist. Methodist. United Church of Christ. Presbyterian. Pentecostal/Charismatic. Independent. No church background. With our different backgrounds we bring different worship styles, different approaches to leadership, and various interpretations of the Bible.

2. Our conversion experience affects our preferences. Whatever attracts us to Christ, becomes valuable to us. For example, I became a Christian through the preaching of the Sunday morning worship services. As a result preaching and the worship service became very vital to my Christian life. If a friend led you to Christ before you started attending church, relationships are most important to you. You will want a church that develops close friendships to encourage one another.

3. Our generation factors into our preferences. We are a gifted church because we have four or five generations in this church. Every generation is unique in their ideas of what is best. Some generations worship in quietness, meditatively, and very orderly. Some Christians worship without the use of any musical instruments. The worship soothes the feelings and comforts their hearts. God loves to be worshiped in the quietness of this style of worship. Other generations worship with as much noise as the sound system can endure. These folks want their feelings about God stirred. They celebrate the cleansing of their sins and the presence of God's Spirit. In a worship service we put all the generations with their preferences together. Someone will not be happy. The problems of being multi-generational is far better than being a one generation church which is destined for extinction.

Does the Bible have any direction for us? We need a word from God or we will entrench ourselves in our own likes and dislikes to crusade against those who disagree. Change is a paradox. If nothing changes in a church,

we become bored with the church. If changes are made, we become insecure with the changes that push us out of our comfort zone. Because our preferences have the potential to interrupt God's purpose for us, we need guidance from the Scriptures.

Our example is the Apostle Paul who gave up his preferences for the sake of God's message of salvation. His life was vastly different from our lives. He operated within a completely different set of culture and worship styles. I appeal to you on the basis of what Paul emphasized through repetition in this Scripture. Verse 19 says, "...so that I may win more." Verse 20 says, "...so that I might win Jews" and "...so that I might win those who are under the Law." Verse 21 says, "... so that I might win those who are without law." Verse 22 says, "... so that I might win the weak."

We also want to win people to Christ in order for them to have a personal, lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ. The challenge is for those who are mature or already in the Lord's church to adapt for those who are looking to be a follower of Christ. Will you ask yourself this question? What can I give up that I dearly like to help someone come to know Jesus Christ?

I. BE FREE BUT BE ENSLAVED TO ALL, Vv. 19-22

- A. Out of your freedom choose to be a slave to everyone.
 - 1. The context of this statement is his refusal of payment for his ministry.
 - 2. Paul believes God's messenger should be paid.
 - a. 9:7ff - A soldier does not serve at his own expense, a farmer eats the fruit of his vineyard and the shepherd eats of the flock.
 - b. He quotes Moses - You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.
 - c. The application is that the proclaimer of God's message can expect to share in material things.
- B. Paul and Barnabas chose to not use this right.
 - 1. They were tentmakers by occupation.
 - 2. Their business provided for their expenses.
 - 3. Paul boasted he supported himself.
- C. Paul wanted to be free from all but to enslave himself to everyone in order to win more people to Christ.

1. He acted like a Jew observing their customs in order to win some of them to Jesus Christ.
2. He acted as though he was under the Law to win some of those under the Law.
3. He respected those who had no Law though he was under Christ's law to lead some of them to Christ.
4. He became as weak for those who are weak in order to lead some of them to Christ.

D. Applic. - We want to win some people to Christ.

1. One of our core values is Adaptability.
 - a. Our world is changing rapidly.
 - b. Paul never gave up the essentials; he gave up his culture.
 - c. Ex. - The older I become the more I want things to stay the same. A preacher friend of mine says that when we refuse to change our preferences we have started the beginning of stagnation.
2. Illus. - On a mission trip, I noticed that most of the men had one very long finger nail. It was on the third finger on the left hand. Here in America only women have such long finger nails. I thought about telling them how sissy it looks for a man to have a long finger nail. Since that was the finger where most people, including men, wore their wedding ring, I supposed it had something to do with their marriage vows. Why did they have a long finger nail on the third finger of the left hand? I gained enough courage to ask about this rather strange custom in my view. A man told me, "We grow a long finger nail so we can scratch our head when it itches." People have many little customs that are not right or wrong.
3. For those customs and habits which do not violate the Bible, we adapt to what helps people come to Christ.
4. We Americans prefer to worship in a building designed and built for that purpose but other Christians throughout the world worship in their homes or other buildings designed for other purposes.
5. Paul considered himself a slave to everyone.
 - a. Paul laid his preferences aside to accept other's preferences.
 - b. He matured to a stage in the Christian life until he said, "I can rejoice when my desires and wants are set aside to provide for someone else's desires and wants."
 - c. The issue is not my wants but what can I give up for others?

6. Ric Warren admits the church is to accept everyone but we do not have to endorse everyone.

II. BE FREE BUT DO ALL FOR CHRIST, V. 23

- A. Paul - I do all things for the sake of the gospel.
 1. He is adaptable in all things for the gospel.
 2. He does not compromise on principles.
 - a. Ephesians 2:8 - For by grace are you saved through faith, not by works.
 - b. Gal. 5:4 - You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.
 - c. Rom. 6:1, 2 - Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be!
 3. In Rom. 14:1ff - Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.
 - a. Imagine a devout Jew eating pork!
 - b. Imagine a devout Jew eating meat once offered to idols!
 - c. Paul broke from his Jewish upbringing to present Christ to people.
- B. Applic. - We need to sort out the essential doctrines from traditions, customs, and preferences.
 1. Churches cannot agree on what is essential and what is preference.
 2. We cannot survive without the preferences.
 3. Ex. - Pretend with me that I am a man of the world but I go to church to check it out. I have been conditioned by the world in which I live including TV, my friends, Wal*Mart, and the business world. My wife, children, and I have never been to this church before today. We will first need a parking space. If there are no spaces it means lots of people are here but if there is no parking space, I may leave. We find a place to park. We enter the building looking for signs to tell me where to go. I am a man. I do not like to ask for directions. A friendly man and woman greet us who make me feel we are wanted. We receive a bulletin but I need the restroom and one child needs the Nursery and the other one needs to find CX2. My wife and I go first to the Nursery where we register our little girl with the Nursery workers. They register us

with her name and a number. We proceed to the room for CX2 where we are greeted and introduced to the other helpers. We leave our boy with them feeling confident he is in good hands. Now we need the restroom. A man guides me within a few yards of the restroom. It is clean which is good. An usher is waiting to show us to the place of worship. He asks us where I would prefer to sit; I spot an old friend I know. He leads us to that seat. We greet my friend before I read the papers given to me. The sermon outline gives me an idea of what subject to expect. I look for groups to check-out. I notice the big screen is showing some visuals. Oh, yes, my Blackberry, I should turn it off. The music starts the service. We like the music because it sounds like what I hear often. After we are comfortable with the music we begin to notice the words. The words speak often about God, which is good because we are searching for God. The people greet us during “greeting” time. The offering plate comes by but no one coerces me to give. I toss in a few dollars just to help with the bills. Now the preacher steps in front of us. He is not wearing a big robe. He is not even wearing a suit and tie. I prepare myself for the big fellow to start shouting but I am prepared because I can turn him off. He talks like we are in conversation but he is speaking about the Bible. Now he is using examples of what this book tells me to do. Church is not so bad. I had a good experience. Now it's over and people are inviting us to have a few refreshments. The donuts were appealing and the coffee was enough to wake me up from the preacher's speech. Only kidding! I am now interested in hearing more about Jesus Christ. Do you understand why we need to prefer people before us?

5. Our world needs help desperately. Within the last 40 years:
 - Violent crime has increased over 500 percent.
 - Illegitimate births have increased 400 percent.
 - Divorces have increased 400 percent.
 - Children living in single-parent homes have increased 300 percent.
 - Child abuse has increased 340 percent since 1976.
 - Teenage suicide has increased 200 percent.
 - S.A.T. scores have dropped almost 80 points, despite huge increases in support for education.

Focus on the Family Newsletter.

C. Paul instructs us further.

1. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.
2. Illus. - When we travel to other countries, we often make cultural mistakes. One American preacher said he was invited to speak to a church in a totally different environment. A young attractive woman sat in the front row with a very receptive attitude. After a few minutes she winked at him with a big smile. He interpreted her wink and smile as being friendly. He winked at her every time she winked at him. He and this young woman were having a great time smiling and winking at each other until the service closed. He learned in that culture that a wink from a man to a woman was a type of flirting. This woman thought he was looking for a wife. He was trying to be friendly. We can violate the culture of our own community.
3. My discomfort is well worth the price of seeing people come to Christ.

CONCLUSION - A family in Tennessee have five daughters. Their seven year old girl is adopted from an orphanage in China. She has now been with this family for about four years. After the first year of being with her new family, her parents told her how excited and happy they were that she was one of their daughters. They asked her how she felt about being their adopted daughter. She mentioned she liked flying from China to the United States. She also included some of the exciting things she enjoyed in America. After a few minutes she said with all the sincerity of a four-year-old girl, "What took you so long?" She wanted to know why they had not come to the orphanage in China sooner. We are looking for spiritual orphans who need a church home for their faith or a church to build their faith. We do not want to hear them ask us, "What took you so long?"