

1 Cor. 9:19-23 (WCF 20:2) “The Most Dutiful Servant”

For the Children: Most people don't like others telling them what to do. You do what you are told when it agrees with God's Word (so you should be doing it anyway); when the person has authority over you (like a parent or teacher; or sometimes just because it's more humble than arguing back. If we are hard to get along with, people may not want to listen when we tell them about the Lord. The saying, “God first, others second, self last” is a good rule for life. We must always obey God's Word. Where possible, we try to do good to others. But we must not let others try to act like God, inventing new rules that we are supposed to believe and obey. **Questions:** What is the believer free from, when it comes to dealing with other people? Why is it wrong to add new laws to the Bible? What does it mean to be “all things to all men”?

Introduction:

First Point: Free From All

- 1) What It Does and Doesn't Mean: “Free from all men” needs to be seen in the context of the believer's freedom from the guilt and condemnation and power of sin, from ceremonial law and from obtaining salvation through our own obedience. This applies to the conscience: the conscience is free in the above ways, but not free to ignore the moral law. God is still “Lord of the conscience” (WCF 20:2). See Rom. 13:5; 1 Cor. 10:28. Conscience is harmed if we violate God's law, or even if we *believe* we are doing the wrong thing (Rom. 13:5; 1 Cor. 10:28). Freedom from men means freedom from men trying to remove the freedom God gives in these areas
- 2) No Tyranny of Conscience: “Freedom from all men” does not mean that the individual's conscience is free to stand over others like a tyrant. The conscience is not infallible. It must be trained to listen to God's Word. We need to humbly acknowledge it can err
- 3) No Binding on “Indifferent Matters”: Men may make useful rules to keep order in the church (BCF 32). But they may not try to bind on the conscience (i.e., make it a matter of sin vs. righteousness) on anything contrary to or additional to the Word of God. See Mt. 15:9; Gal. 5:1. Blind obedience to human authority betrays the God-given liberty of conscience. If this adds to salvation by Christ alone, the very Gospel is at stake (Gal. 1:6)
- 4) No Implicit Faith: WCF 20:2 also warns that ignoring our “freedom from all men” can involve “implicit faith” – the Roman Catholic doctrine that faith without knowledge is acceptable, so long as one trusts that the church knows what it is doing. Implicit faith also makes man partly the “lord of the conscience”
- 5) No New Ceremonial Law: Allowing men to add new rules to the Bible is like adding a new ceremonial law, as the Pharisees tried to do

Second Point: Free For All

- 1) Voluntary Slaves: Paul says he has made himself a slave to all – it is not imposed on him by men, but by God. Our conscience is bound to honour God every way we can, obeying all of His laws – such as the “law of love.” Therefore we will not always choose to exercise the freedom we have, if by freely limiting ourselves we can honour God or help our neighbour. We desire our neighbour's salvation. We try not to let our liberty cause others to stumble (1 Cor. 8:9). This is also why Paul seeks to be “all things to all men” – for “win” or “save” them
- 2) All Things to All Men: Sometimes it is hard to know when to stand up for a God-given freedom, and when to be “all things” to others. Paul had Timothy circumcised because of the Jews (Acts 16:3), but not Titus (Gal. 2:3). It depends on what will best serve the Gospel and the welfare of sinners. However, being “all things to all” does not mean we are free to disobey God. We are free with “indifferent matters,” if we can act in good conscience
- 3) Gracious Rewards for Dutiful Service: Serving others in a way that promotes the Gospel brings the gracious blessing that we then become partakers in the advance of the Gospel (v. 23)

Conclusion: