

THE POSSIBILITIES OF A SOUL WINNER

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Text: I Corinthians 9:19-23

For the apostle Paul the word “might” represented great possibilities. Notice how many times that the word is repeated in our text. But more importantly notice the hope that surrounds its use. When Paul saw lost people he saw possibilities—great possibilities.

Some people only want to obey God in soul winning if they know that they can be a great success. Paul says, “I’m a success if I try.” He knew that he wasn’t going to be able to win everybody but he knew that he could win some. He was going to do all that he could because he “might” just win somebody to Christ.

His philosophy can be seen in the words of our text. Note the *opportunities* that Paul saw for witnessing.

1. I might win somebody like me.
2. I might win somebody like you.
3. I might win somebody like us.

I. I MIGHT WIN SOMEBODY LIKE ME (v. 20).

■ *I Corinthians 9:20, “and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law;” (NKJ)*

- A. Paul was at one time as lost as any law keeping Jew.

B. Paul had at one time trusted in his own goodness instead of Christ.

■ Philippians 3:4-8 Paul said, “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”

C. Where is our desire to see people receive what we have received?

■ William Temple said, “Nobody can be indwelt by the Spirit of God and keep that Spirit to himself. Where the Spirit is, he flows forth. And where there is no flowing forth, he is not there.”

-- William Temple, in his Readings in John's Gospel, quoted by John R. W. Stott, "Keeping the Right Company," Preaching Today, Tape No. 46.

II. I MIGHT WIN SOMEBODY LIKE YOU (v. 21).

■ *1 Corinthians 9:21, “to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;” (NKJ)*

A. Paul was willing to try and win people who were different from himself.

■ “He would transgress no laws of Christ to please or humour any man; but he would accommodate himself to all men, where he might do it lawfully, to gain some.” Matthew Henry

B. He was willing to consider someone else's background in his presentation of the gospel.

■ “To those that are without the law as without law that is, to the Gentiles, whether converted to the Christian faith or not. In innocent things he could comply with people's usages or humours for their advantage. He would reason with the philosophers in their own way.”

Matthew Henry

C. You and I are “the other person” to someone.

III. I MIGHT WIN SOMEBODY LIKE US (v. 22).

■ *1 Corinthians 9:22 reads, “To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” (NKJ)*

A. Paul knew that he could even win those with great weaknesses.

■ “He would not sin against God to save the soul of his neighbour, but he would very cheerfully and readily deny himself. The rights of God he could not give up, but he might resign his own, and he very often did so for the good of others.” Matthew Henry

B. He never exalted himself above those who stumbled easily.

Paul was a powerful witness for Christ but only because he knew when his strength came from. He had no desire to exalt himself over anyone because he knew, without God he was nothing.

■ Corrie Ten Boom tells the story of “A woodpecker (who) tapped with his beak against the stem of a tree just as lightning struck the tree and destroyed it. He flew away and said, "I didn't know there was so much power in my beak!" When we bring the Gospel there is a danger that we will think or say, "I have done a good job." Don't be a silly woodpecker. Know where your strength comes from. It is only the Holy Spirit who can make a message good and fruitful.”

-- Corrie Ten Boom in Each New Day. Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 3.

C. We all have our share of weaknesses that we should consider.

■ Daniel T. Niles writes, “Evangelism is witness. It is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food. The Christian does not offer out of his bounty. He has no bounty. He is simply a guest at his Master's table and, as evangelist, he calls others too.”

-- Daniel T. Niles in That They May Have Life. Christianity Today, Vol. 32, no. 18.

CONCLUSION

I dare you to eat one pretzel. All I have to do is to pick up one of those things, and I'm hooked. The salt in that pretzel creates a desire for more. A number of years ago, when I was a student at the seminary, I was invited to preach in west Texas. You've all heard of Nowhere? Well, this was twenty-five miles beyond that. The teeming crowds were gathering--all seventeen of them. (I think it was Rally Day!) I preached with all of the fervor and passion of my heart. When I got through, this tall Texan came up and said, "You were wrong."

"Well, sir," I said, "I've been wrong on many occasions. Give me the information."

He said, "In your sermon you made a moronic statement. You said you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. And that ain't true, 'cause you can feed him salt."

-- Howard Hendricks, "Beyond the Bottom Line," Preaching Today, Tape No. 101.

What makes people want what you've got is when they sense that what you have meets a need in their life. It's what people are thirsty for. These are the *opportunities* that we must be looking for.