

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: March 25, 2018

Lesson Title: "Influencing for Christ"

Lesson Passage: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 10:31-33; 11:1

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Paul's main point in the lesson passage is summarized succinctly in 1 Cor. 10:33 (TEV): "I try to please everyone in all that I do, not thinking of my own good, but of the good of all, so that they might be saved." EXPLANATION: In a previous passage (1 Cor. 9:1-6), Paul has responded to critics within the Corinthian church by defending his rights as an apostle. But now he is saying, "I try to be cordial with everyone, even my critics, so as not to hinder their relationship with Christ."

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain the meaning of Paul's self-imposed "slavery." (2) Cite a Beatitude that reflects the attitude Paul is advocating in the lesson passage.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Begin with this anecdote: When the new pastor of a Texas church preached his first message to the congregation, he said, "None of you will be my boss; but I will be a servant to all of you." Connect this with the lesson passage: This is what Paul was saying to the Corinthian church when he wrote in 1 Cor. 9:19, "I am a free man, nobody's slave; but I make myself everybody's slave in order to win as many people as possible." Then explain: Paul was echoing the principle Jesus taught his disciples in Mark 10:43, "whoever would be great among you must be your servant."

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Explain the context in which Paul wrote 1 Cor. 19-22: As we have already noted, the church in Corinth was seriously divided when Paul wrote this letter; and he himself was the target of critics in that Christian community. We know, from what he wrote in his own defense at the beginning of chapter 9, what some of their charges were. EXAMPLES: (1) Some critics (probably from a Judaistic background) claimed that he was not really an apostle, since he was not one of the original Twelve. (Refer to "Am I not an apostle?" in 9:1.) (2) Some even criticized him for refusing to let the church support him financially. This proved to them that he was not a real apostle. Ironically, they should have been commending him for refusing to be a burden to the church, for he had a perfect right to receive food and drink for his work (see 1 Cor. 9:4). (3) They complained that Paul was unmarried and preferred to travel with companions like Barnabas, Silas and Luke, unlike the other apostles, who took their wives on missionary journeys (*refer to 9:5*).

2. With the foregoing thoughts as a background, read Paul's response to his critics in 1 Cor. 9:19: (1) The Translator's New Testament renders 9:19, "Although I am no man's slave, I have made myself every man's slave." His reason for this was "to win as many people as possible" (TEV). (2) Point out that the attitude that Paul expresses in v. 19 is very much in keeping with Jesus' beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the meek" (Mt. 5:5). COMMENT: Meekness is voluntary submissiveness; not weakness, but "strength under control." Without doubt, Paul was intellectually superior and better educated than his adversaries in Corinth. He possessed Roman citi-

zenship, a rare privilege; and he had experienced an unusually dramatic conversion. In all these ways, Paul was superior to his critics; yet, he voluntarily chose to be their servant. AN ADDED THOUGHT: Jesus also said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (doing things that bring about peace and harmony). Paul was intent on making peace with his critics in Corinth, since a belligerent attitude would have negated his influence as a Christian witness.

3. Read 1 Cor. 9:20-23, then observe that Paul is describing a principle that has contributed immensely to the effectiveness of the work of missionaries in distant lands: Adopt the language and folkways of the people you are hoping to win to faith in Christ, rather than attempting to "Americanize" them. ILLUSTRATION: Charlotte "Lottie" Moon, the legendary Southern Baptist missionary to China in the late 19th and early 20th centuries won countless people to faith in Christ by immersing herself in Chinese culture. She wore Chinese clothing, lived in a Chinese house, adopted the language and customs of the people in her village, Pingtu, and shared her food, often in meager supply, with hungry neighbors. Like Paul, she "became all things to all people, that she might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 10:22).

4. Comment on Paul's comparisons of the Christian life to athletic contests in the Isthmian games in 1 Cor. 9:24-27: (1) He begins with a foot race, where there is only one winner (v. 24). COMMENT: Paul undoubtedly realized that his "one winner" analogy didn't quite fit his application to the Christian life, where, theoretically, all could win the race. His point is that his Christian readers must run their race with the same determination as a competitive runner. (2) He next shifts to the rigorous training that all contestants must undergo in order to obtain a prize (v. 25). The thought in this verse is that an athlete who is serious about competing for a prize must maintain strict discipline in conditioning his body. NOTE: The "perishable crown" was a wreath of pine that was given to a successful athlete in Paul's day. But, in contrast, Paul and his fellow Christians would win a prize that would never perish. (3) In verses 26 & 27, Paul is thinking about his own struggle. He doesn't waste time and energy engaging in pointless activity. He doesn't just "become weary in well-doing" (2 Thess. 3:13).

CLOSING THE LESSON

FOR DISCUSSION: Paul's point about "beating the air" (v. 26) is worth thinking about as we contemplate the array of religious activities from which we might choose. It's tempting to throw ourselves into "doing good things," praying that God will bless the effort, instead of first asking God what good things He would have us do.

Lucien Coleman P.O. Box 2951 Weatherford TX 76086 682-262-1312