

Rethinking Pauline Dialectics on Freedom and Slavery in 1 Cor 9:19-23: Implications for the Church in Africa

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Abstract

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The study explores Pauline dialectics of freedom and slavery in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and its implications for the African Church's mission. By analyzing Paul's strategic approach to ministry, where he underscores freedom in Christ with voluntary servanthood, the research highlights the potential for the church in Africa to synergise with Pauline strategy for a robust mission endeavour. The study employs Historical Critical exegesis and Contextual analysis to examine the relevance of Paul's dialectics for the African church. It argues that African church can leverage on Paul's strategic approach which emphasises flexibility, adaptability, and contextualisation in mission. Findings suggest that Pauline dialectics of freedom and slavery can impact African church's mission strategy, enabling it to effectively engage diverse cultures and contexts. By embracing a similar approach, African church can promote a nuanced contextualised and effective mission, ultimately advancing the spread of the gospel in Africa. The study contributes to the ongoing conversation on mission strategy and contextualisation in the African church, offering insights into the potential benefits of adopting a Pauline approach to ministry.

Keywords: Freedom, Slavery, Dialectics, Contextualisation, Flexibility, Adaptation.

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Introduction

Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 showcases a nuanced and intricate discourse on freedom and slavery, as he navigates the murky waters of mission. The study is situated within the broader narratives of care for the weaker believers of the Corinthian church, Paul's apologia of his apostolic rights and responsibilities and the paradoxical abdication of these rights. Paul adopts a defensive posture against detractors who attacked his apostleship and his gospel (Capes et al

86). He contends the revelation of his mission as coming not from man but from God, ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Gal 1:11-12). The Apostle leverages on his freedom in Christ for slavery to all, so as to win as many as possible, as a contextual ministerial strategy among the diverse cultures in the Greco-Roman empire. The paper engages Paul's dialectics as its own contribution to ongoing conversation on African church participation to global missionary work in the twenty first century. This is in line with The Lord's charge given to his apostles for global



mission in Acts 1:8. Paul's assertion of his freedom in Christ, and slavery to all for the sake of the gospel underscores his approach to cultural adaptation and evangelism. This model challenges contemporary African church leaders to recalibrate their strategies in sync with contextual realities as they evangelise to different cultures. Paul was a goal getter, and as a missionary tactician, he went out to meet his audience wherever they were, travelling through the length and breadth of Galatia, Greece, Macedonia, Corinth, Pisidia Antioch, and indeed the entire Roman world. He sought His audience, found them and brought the good news to them. Schnabel is of the view that Paul the missionary cannot be separated from Paul the theologian, submitting that missionary work and theological reflection about the gospel are mutually dependent (1473). Dunn posits that Paul is generally regarded as the first Christian theologian was doubtlessly recognized as a quintessential missionary par excellence (2). The study argues for the adoption of Paul's evangelistic strategy by African church leaders to take the gospel not only to Africa but to the Western Nations where Christianity is noose diving into the oblivion.

CORINTH CITY

Paul came to Corinth the capital of the province of Achaia in about 50-51 AD. The city was founded in the 10th Century BCE, and having been the richest port it was the largest city in ancient Greece. It was strategically located on the narrow Isthmus separating the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea, connecting the Peloponnesus, also known as southern Greece to the mainland. It was a powerful commercial center near two seaports and only 4 miles apart. On the western axis was the port of Lechaem, with a harbour in the Corinthian Gulf which served as the trading port to Italy and Sicily. On the eastern axis was Cenchreae, whose harbour in the Saronic Gulf was the port for the eastern Mediterranean countries. Corinth was a multi-racial Greek city and culture that was under Roman rule. It was made up of many different races and people groups. As a port city, it was a center of trade and commerce for its region with many local religions and gods worshipping the Greek Pantheon.

Blomberg asserts that Corinth housed an eighteen thousand-seat theater, a three thousand-seat hall, and a large central market for farmers and that every other year Corinth hosted the Isthmus games second only to Olympics in prominence among athletic competition in Greece, (Pentecost to Patmos 163). This was the opportunity Paul looked out for to propagate the Gospel. He used his concentration method of evangelism where there were large crowds to gather people for his sermons. He effectively used Market places, town squares, Areopagus and a host of other concentration places for the Gospel.

Corinth was noted for its sexual pervasiveness and temple cult prostitution. Capes, Reeves and Richards observed that ancient Greek city of Corinth had earned the reputation as a place where unbridled sexual passions could find limitless opportunities, (142). To "corinthianize" was a euphemism for fornication. Thus Corinth was a 'mecca' for cult prostitution and fertility cults and these prospered in the city. Blomberg corroborates that in pre-Christian times the Aphrodite temple cult employed over a thousand sacred priests or priestesses who doubled as prostitutes, and the Greek word to "corinthianize" meant "to play the harlot" and the term "Corinthian girl" was a slang for a "whore" (Blomberg 163). This was the city Paul came to evangelize to set it free from sin.

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

Paul established the church at Corinth on his second evangelistic journey in about 50-51 AD. He stayed in Corinth for 18 months (Acts 18:10-11), working with Aquila, Prisca and Roman Jews. During Paul's third evangelistic journey, he stayed in Ephesus for three years (Acts 19:10; 20:31). It was at Ephesus that he had correspondence from the Corinthian Christians who had misunderstood his earlier letter to them, a letter said to be lost (1Cor 5:9). Paul wrote 1Corinthians from Ephesus (1Cor 16:8-9,19 during his third evangelistic journey in 54-55 AD to a new and an immature congregation (3:1-3). The Corinthian church like the church of Christ in Africa had its own fair share of problems. 1Corinthians is Paul's response to the quagmire facing the Corinthian church. In reply to them, Paul wrote to

address these issues: the believers split in the church (1:11), inbreeding (5:1), contestations about the Holy Communion (11:18), resurrection issues (15:12) and court cases among believers (6:1-11). Other concerns include matters about which the Corinthians had written to him. Paul replied, *περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε* indicating that Paul was responding to issues raised by the congregation. The responses to these concerns are chronicled in; 1Cor 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 15:1 and 16:1 where gave answers. He reminded the church about ancient Israel's unfaithfulness in the wilderness which was to serve as a warning shot to them.

Authorship

Paul without doubt wrote the Book of 1Corinthians. This assertion is supported by the fact that the first word of 1 Corinthians states that *Παῦλος κλητὸς ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ καὶ Σωσθένης ὁ ἀδελφός* (1Cor 1:1). This claim supports the fact that Paul is its author with his brother in Christ Σωσθένης. Therefore, there is no good reason to doubt his authorship. The epistle undoubtedly becomes one of 13 epistles written by the author. All his epistles constitute a major corpus of the New Testament showcasing his unique style of writing, exegesis, and exhortation. Wallace citing Robertson and Plummer, *I Corinthians (ICC)*, xvi. asserts that "Both the external and the internal evidence for the Pauline authorship are so strong that those who attempt to show that the apostle was not the writer succeed chiefly in proving their own incompetence as critics (16). On the Internal Evidence, Paul gives his own name as the author in 1Corinthians 1:1. The book contains many personal details about Paul which agree with the other books of the New Testament. Because Paul established the church in Corinth, he felt a sense of personal responsibility for the members of that church (4:15). So, Paul had a good reason to write this letter.

Date

New Testament scholars generally concur that 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus before Pentecost in the spring of 54 or 55 AD (Garland 20). This date for this epistle allowing for Paul's travels and nearly three year stay in Ephesus (Acts 19: 10;

20:21) is late winter or early spring of AD 55 (Blomberg 164). Other scholars agree also that 1Corinthians was probably written in AD 55 while Paul was ministering in Ephesus (McCain 201). Yet others submit that the letter was written during Gallio's term as governor of Corinth which was short lived as reported by Seneca, his brother, due to an illness which disrupted his reign in Corinth and had to return to Rome (Witherington, 318). Murphy O Conner (21) notes that Gallio sat over Paul's case brought by the Jews (Acts 18:12-18) between July and September AD 51. According to Witherington (319) this meant that Paul was in Corinth in AD 51 and that the impression left by Acts 18 (cf. v11 and v18) is that Paul stayed a good while in Corinth after the encounter with the proconsul.

Occasion

Capes, Reeves and Richards posit that Paul adopted a defensive posture against detractors who had attacked his Apostleship and his Gospel. First, Paul responds that his Gospel did not originate from man (86). Rather he received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. Some argued that Paul did not qualify for Apostleship. Those who held this view maintain that he certainly failed to meet the criteria for Apostleship established by the early Church when they were seeking for a replacement for Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:21-22). Paul is accused of lacking the qualifications of a true Apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles (2Cor 12:12). Kasemann however, interprets Paul's own notion of Apostleship as Christological that is bound in the mind of Christ (1Cor 2:16) whose sufferings entail "weakness (671). On the issue bordering on Paul's Apostolic qualification, Grudem asserts that in order "to qualify as an Apostle, one had to have seen Christ with his own eyes after he rose from the dead, and had to have been specifically appointed by Christ as an Apostle (911). Ridderbros shares this position when he corroborates that Apostles in the sense of 1Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11, are those who have beheld Christ himself, the eyewitnesses of the redemptive even lying at the foundation of the Church, who have been called by Christ himself to this special ministry (448-449). Paul may have not physically seen Christ, but he saw him in the

Christophany, when on the road to Damascus Christ appeared to him, (Acts 9:3-4).

Conceptual Framework

Freedom in Christ

Paul's freedom in Christ project is the subject of the study. He pronounces his freedom from all "ελεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων (1Cor 9:19). In context, Paul's freedom is here to be seen in the light freedom from the mundane and of not being enslaved or obligated to anybody. Paul declared his freedom from all things and all men that impeded the conduct of mission in order to proclaim the Good News of the free Grace of Christ (Thiselton 74-82). The free Grace which Paul proclaims is free in many perspectives; it is free, sovereign and unfettered, it is presented to all for their acceptance by faith alone. It is the source and principle of "liberation from" all kinds of material and spiritual bondage including the bondage of legalism and the bondage of moral decay.

Slavery in Christ

While Paul declares his freedom from all, he goes on to mortgage this freedom for slavery to all, *πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα (1Cor 9:19)*. Paul is concerned about the new concept of *eleutheria* 'freedom,' he has found in v.19, and subsequently he is prepared to trade away his *exousia*, rights, in vv. 1-18, for the sake of the Gospel (Fee 1987, p. 425). Since as Christ's *doulos* (slave), he trades away the issue of wages (vv17-18), so as to be free from all things for mission work to thrive among the Jews and Gentiles.

Contextualisation

Gwamna notes that contextualisation is the process in which Biblical message and interpretation are situated or directed towards a particular milieu of a people in order to make more sense and provide meaningful enrichment of their Christian experience (203). The overriding goal of contextualisation is that of making the Word relevant and meaningful in its application within context as it concentrates on meaning, relevance and context.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this work is premised on G. W. F. Hegel's dialectics. While Hegel's and Paul's writings have different philosophical and theological underpinnings, one can still apply Hegel's dialectics to analyze Paul's thoughts in 1Corinthians 9:19-23. Pinkard observes that the opposing sides in Hegel's and Paul's work are found in the subject matter. This is the position adopted in Paul's dialectics, where the "opposing sides" are "freedom" and "slavery" as these concepts stand in opposition to each other from the standpoint of logical argument, (2018). Like Hegel, Paul's dialectics leads to a development from less sophisticated views to more sophisticated ones, i.e. from sinful nature to spiritual nature.

Thesis: Paul's Freedom in 1Cor 9:19

Paul's usage of the Greek term *ελευθερια*; i.e. "freedom," in his first Corinthian letter, chapter nine (1Cor 9), is quite at variance with the ideals of freedom set forth by the Greek speaking people at various stages of their history. Pauline emphasis of being free from all can be seen as the thesis, highlighting the fundamental aspect of freedom in Christ., and not be construed in the perspectives of sociology, philosophy, psychology, or politics or freedom of the will.

Antithesis: Paul's Slavery in 1Cor 9: 19-22

Paul's willingness to surrender his freedom to become a slave to all can be seen as the antithesis, representing a voluntary surrender of his once cherished freedom for the sake of others. He begins 1Corinthians 9 in an atmosphere befuddled with tension as he poses lots of rhetorical questions concerning his call for ministry. He defended his calling to those who questioned his credentials for ministry as an apostle (9:1-4). In this humongous crisis, Paul dishes out paradoxical terms; boasting and obligation (9:15, 16), reward and commission (9:17, 18). Paul considers his calling as an obligation to proclaim the gospel, and for him it is not a time to boast or to be arrogant because of his earlier gained freedom, but it is a cause for boasting for the execution of this mandate for the Lord even as it is not a means to an end for a reward or a commission

Paul's Synthesis: To Win as Many as Possible for Christ in 1Cor 9:23

The synthesis can be seen in Paul's desire for effective ministry and gospel proclamation, he balances his freedom in Christ with his willingness to serve others. Arising from the thesis; that is, the freedom Paul received from Christ and the immediate antithesis which necessitated the struggles of 'slavery' for his new assignment, the apostle synthesised by advancing reasons why he became a servant to all men. He is motivated by the joy from servitude to Christ, the reward of a slavish devotion to all his neighbors, both those under God's law and those outside the law. First, it was for the sake of the Gospel (1Cor 9:15-18), whose spread to the gentiles was laid upon him. Second, it was for the sake of sinners that Paul ensured that the gospel was declared without hindrances (1Cor 9:19-23). Thirdly, it was for his sake that he might share in its blessings (9:23).

Contextual analysis of 1cor 9:19-23

Paul begins this pericope by revisiting preceding discourses, eating τῆς βρώσεως τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων eating food sacrificed to idols (1Cor 8:4), by those whose spiritual conscience is weak καὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενῆς (1Cor 8:7). Paul goes on in Chapter 9 to ask four rhetorical questions in verse 1 concerning the authenticity of his apostolic rights; He queried those who doubted his calling, Οὐκ εἰμι ἐλεύθερος; "am I not free?" οὐκ εἰμι ἀπόστολος; οὐχὶ Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἑώρακα; οὐ τὸ ἔργον μου ὑμεῖς ἐστε ἐν κυρίῳ; (1Cor 9:1). The apostle adduced five reasons why he felt eminently qualified to receive support for his work. He stated that while others did not recognize him as an apostle, the Corinthians should without hesitation approve his apostleship for they were the seal of his apostleship in the Lord. As an Apostle, Paul had the right to receive support from the people to whom he ministered. Paul had no wife, if he had a wife, she too would have had the right to be supported by the church. For instance, Peter was a married man (Mark 1:30), and his wife traveled with him. Paul had the same right, but he did not use it. The other Apostles did not work to support themselves because they gave themselves completely to the ministry of the

Word. However, both Paul and Barnabas laboured with their own hands to support not only themselves, but also the men who laboured with them. Other reasons that qualified him for support include the customary practice that the worker should be paid for work done in verse seven. Paul reasoned that if laborers in secular occupations are paid, then apostles should also be paid their wages. It was the custom of the people that the workman deserved some reward for his labors. Thus if a man is drafted to be a soldier, the government pays his wages and provides a certain amount of supplies for him. The man who plants a vineyard gets to eat the fruit, just as the shepherd or herdsman has the right to use the milk from the animals. Paul continues that the Old Testament forbids the muzzling of an ox while it is treading out the grain (Deu 25:4). The apostle was metaphorical in the application of the "ox muzzling" principle implying that the laborer has the right to share in the bounties (vs 8-12). Besides, Paul was very much aware of the fact that the Old Testament priests and the Levites lived on sacrifices and offerings brought to the temple. He therefore saw the need that he as an "ox" should not be "muzzled" for doing the work of the Lord. Priests and Levites were supported by the tithes of the people (2Chr 31:4) but were also entitled to certain portions of the sacrificial food offered on the altar just like priests in many ancient pagan temples. Finally, the apostle Paul alludes to a saying of Jesus (Matt 10:10; Luke 10:7; cf. 1 Tim 5:18). Paul proved his point by giving five cogent arguments on why he had the right to expect the Corinthian believers to support him in his ministry in Corinth. Yet he had deliberately refused their support for the reasons he proffers in his next line of defense.

Having adduced five reasons why he was eminently qualified to receive support from the Corinthians, he however refused this support advancing the following arguments. First, it was "for the sake of the Gospel" (vs 15-18). Paul never wanted the work of the spread of the Gospel hindered. Paul was aware that Philosophers supported themselves: by attaching themselves to a wealthy patron, who used them for ostentatious dinner lectures; by charging fees for instruction; by begging; and by working as manual laborers. False teachers were also teaching for the

sake of dishonest gain (Tit 1:11). Paul had the authority (right) to receive material support, but being a mature Christian, he negotiated his authority for mature discipline. Second, Paul refused support from the Corinthians “for the sake of sinners.” To him, the sinners were the weak from the Gentiles and the Jews who must be cared for growth to maturity. He was very flexible in his approach to all of the groups in presenting the gospel to them. Thirdly, Paul refused support “for his sake” for he wanted to receive a lasting reward from Christ his Lord.

Textual Analysis: V19

Paul introduced a new theme on *eleutheria* ‘freedom,’ in v.19, away from the issue of, *exousia*, rights, in vv. 1-18, where after defending his rights for support, paradoxically, chose to forsake these rights for the sake of the Gospel. Fee postulates that the new theme flows directly from the immediately preceding argument, as an essential part of it (425). Since as Christ’s *doulos* (slave) he would not receive pay (vv17-18), thereby being free from all people.” A great paradox one might argue. He begins in v19 by responding to the questions he posed in v 1. He asserts, *ελεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα, ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω.* (1Cor 9:19), “even though, I am free from all,” not belonging to anybody, yet he negates himself by saying, *πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα*, I have made myself a slave to everyone.” The Apostle after his apologia and other arguments arising from 1Cor 9:1-18 and from previous arguments of caring for weaker members of the church at Corinth in chapter 8, unequivocally states that he is now *ελεύθερος ἐκ πάντων*, “free from all” to carry on with his contextual work to the Jews and Gentiles. In essence, Paul means that he belongs to no one, and at the same time, his *ελεύθερος ἐκ πάντων* i.e. “freedom from all” means, “freedom for all” thus making him a servant to all.

Pauline dialecticism in v19 is reminiscent of former Nigerian President Buhari, who remarked at his inaugural speech during his swearing in ceremony in 2015, saying, “I belong to everybody, and I belong to nobody,” (<https://punchng.com>). He emphasised his commitment to serving all Nigerians, irrespective of their religious background and affiliation. Buhari’s inaugural declaration was meant to project

him as an un-biased, non-tribal, and non-bigoted leader, but one that stood for all Nigerians. The issue with Buhari’s declaration is that it was ironical, for the president was not only seen as a tribal president, religious begot, but also a political irredentist who aided and abetted the destruction of lives and property of Nigerians in order to annex land for his kinsmen for grazing. In contrast, Paul’s dialectical ‘freedom to slavery’ declaration was so that no rich patron would pocket or own him during the course of his ministry in Corinth. The effect of the contradiction being “in order to win as many as possible (1Cor 9:19).

To the Jews: Vs 20a

καὶ ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαῖος, ἵνα Ἰουδαίους κερδήσω· τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον, μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον κερδήσω. (1Co 9:20).

Paul identifies with Jews having been born a Jew in Tarsus. He announces his Hebraic credentials as one “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 righteousness based on the law, faultless, (Phi 3:5-6). Paul asserted his freedom in Christ, yet he opted to adapt to Jewish culture. He said; *καὶ ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαῖος*, to the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. One wonders at this moment whether Paul was not a real Jew. Was he from another race other than the Jews. Far be from it, for Paul was a full blooded Jew (Phi 3:5). So why did he use the simile “like” a Jew. Witherington reasons that Paul’s Jewishness was anchored on his apocalyptic and messianic Jewishness a Jew who truly believed that the new creation had come because the messiah had come and new occasions taught new duties, (64), The book of Acts records evidences of Paul’s dealing with the Jews (cf. 16:3, 18:18, 21:23f.). Though Paul looked on the ceremonial law as a yoke taken off by Christ, yet in many instances he submitted to it, that he might work upon the Jews, remove their prejudices, prevail with them to hear the Gospel, and win them over to Christ. Even though Paul was Jew in reality, on conversion he no longer appealed to Jewish customs and traditions as the means for salvation. He

now conformed to the Grace which Christ had brought on the Cross of Calvary for salvation of sinners.

Even though Paul has encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, he still chooses to adapt to Jewish traditions. His submission; ὡς Ἰουδαῖος (1Cor 9:20), is buttressed from his account of having Timothy circumcised in preparation for mission to Jewish territory (Acts 16:3); his vow as Nazarene (Acts 18:18) and the payment for the purification expenses for the four others (Acts 21:21ff). Some scholars have argued that Timothy's circumcision was for the sake of his salvation (Bornkamm, 204-205). This view cannot be accepted, for it is apparent that Paul did not want to contravene Jewish tradition concerning circumcision. For Timothy whose mother was Jewish with a Greek father, it was only mandatory that he be circumcised if his mission to the Jews was going to be successful, before undertaking the mission he had to.

To those under the law: τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον, (1Co 9:20).

Paul states his relationship with those under the law τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον, (1Co 9:20). These are Jewish Christians who adhere to Mosaic Laws and the Jewish proselytes who observe Jewish customs, traditions and regulations (Blomberg 184). Paul highlights his ability to adapt Jewish contexts and engage effectively with Jewish audiences, becoming as one under the law in order to win them to Christ. Exegetists have identified that 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 is a chiasmus at display. The Apostle may have created a chiastic balance with “those under the law” to match “the lawless” or “those without the law.” So in the chiastic arrangement it was “the Jews” vs “the Gentiles,” “those under the law” vs “those without the law.” The chiasmus is presented thus; A=19; B=20a; C=20b; C1=21; B1=22a; A1=22b (Craig, 104). Sound as the argument of a chiasmus is, it appears that the Apostle was not just out to display his power of intellect and artistry of the pen. He had in mind certain group of people who were not Jews and yet under the law. These were the Gentile converts to Judaism, the proselytes, the God fearers that were under the threshold of Mosaic law. Paul's message to those under the law was the dawn of a

new beginning to redeem those under the law from the law's demands as one was no longer required to fulfil all the laws to be saved. Paul must have explained to them Jesus' teaching concerning for instance the laws of the Sabbath where He said the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mar 2:27) to arouse their understanding of the new religious order for worship away from Judaism.

Vs 20c: Though I myself am not under the law: μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον, (1Cor 9:20).

In order to exculpate himself from being under the law, the quintessential Apostle went further by enunciating, μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον, though I myself am not under the law, (1Cor 9:20). As a Jewish Christian, Paul was not under the law, he was not however without God's law, Paul had the law of Christ (v. 21). The Apostle supports this assertion in 1 Corinthians 7:19 saying ἡ περιτομή οὐδὲν ἐστὶν καὶ ἡ ἀκροβυστία οὐδὲν ἐστὶν, circumcision is nothing, and un-circumcision is nothing, (1Cor 7:19), but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.” Paul taught the Corinthians that the legal requirements in Jewish law no longer had a profound effect on them, because they were now under the law of Christ, the law of love which the Lord Jesus had earlier summed up as love to God and love one's neighbor (Mat 22:37-39).

V 21: τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος, μὴ ὢν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλ' ἔννομος Χριστοῦ, ἵνα κερδάνω τοὺς ἀνόμους· (1Cor 9:21)

V 21a: τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος, to the lawless as lawless.

Having adapted himself to the service of the Jews and proselytes who were obligated by the law, Paul now turns to τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος, those not having the law (1Cor 9:21). Blomberg agrees that “those not having the law” obviously refers to Gentile apart from any Jewish influence (184). This is Paul's primary missionary constituency, the Gentile mission, as he states that he is a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles. Paul made it clear that salvation was not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles for which he was sent to them so they would turn from idol worship of the gods. Paul adapted to the Gentiles when he gave his homily

at Athens where the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers, market women, members of the Areopagus and of the council and many other people gathered to hear him preach. Other instances include his encounter at Lystra (Act 14:15) and with Governor Felix in Accts 24.

V21b: μή ὄν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλ' ἔννομος Χριστοῦ, not being lawless to God but lawful in Christ (1Co 9:21).

Paul distinguishes between the Jewish law and something he calls alternately “the commandments of God” (7:19) and “the law of Christ,” which is of continuing validity for Christians, whatever their ethnicity. As a Jewish Christian, Paul is without doubt not under Jewish law, he is not however without God's law, Paul has the law of Christ (v. 21). The Apostle supports this assertion in 1 Corinthians 7:19 saying “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.” Paul taught the Corinthians that the legal requirements in Jewish law no longer had a profound effect on them, because they were now under the law of Christ, the law of love which the Lord Jesus had earlier summed up as love to God and love one’s neighbor (Matt 22:37-39).

This second law of Christ appears to include the ethical teaching of Jesus as well as absorbing both the theological structure and many of the moral precepts of the Mosaic Law.

To the weak vs 22a

Finally, it is interesting to observe that Paul had been: a. as the Jews, τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαῖος, (1Cor 9:20); b. as those under the law τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον (1Cor 9:20); c. as those without the law τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος (1Cor 9:21); d. but, when he comes to the weak, Paul does not use the comparative adverb which is a conjunction and a simile; “as” or “like.” He used the verb indicative aorist middle; ἐγενόμην “I became” weak. So Paul became weak to the weak; ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής (1Cor 9:22). Paul was aware of his weakness for Christ as the worst sinner whom Jesus came to save (1Ti 1:15). He delighted in his weaknesses when he declared ὅταν γὰρ ἀσθενῶ, τότε δυνατός εἰμι, (2Cor 12:10).

Like those under the law, exegetists, and commentators sought to find out who “the weak” in this pericope were. Some scholars are of the opinion that “the weak” here could be that weak brother in 1 Corinthians 8 where the ‘adjective’ ἀσθενής appears five times and eleven times in 1 Corinthians (Blomberg 104). Others are however quick to observe that the subjunctive active verb κερδήσω derived from κερδαίνω “to win” is a missionary implying “winning an unbeliever to ones’ faith.” jargon The origin of the word κερδαίνω is traced to Judaism whose members used in converting proselytes to their religion. Thus Paul adopted the word from Judaist religious literature and used it five times in the pericope under study for the conversion of non-Christians to Christ. The weak may be Corinthian believers with weak consciences, or the weak may be Christians who were weak in faith (Rom 14:1) whom the Apostle tried to win to mature in faith so that they will not backslide. The weak may also include economically weak (Kistemaker 308-310). These may be members of the Church who need support from the wealthy members of the Church. Paul advised the stronger believers in faith to carry the weak ones along by avoiding doing the things that would help in destroying their already fragile weak faith (1 Co 8:1-11). They were to support them economically too. The matured in faith in the Church are today encouraged to carry the weak along and grow them in faith (Hawthorne et al, 916-917). Those among them who are economically buoyant are to assist in getting employment, or impart skills and whatever assistance they could provide to the lowly needy in their Churches.

I have become all things to all people; vs 22b

This was Paul’s missionary strategy and flexibility. Paul knew that it takes tact to have contact. So τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα was his mantra (1Cor 9:22). He was aware that a good witness tries to build bridges, not walls. This analogy is evidenced in Paul’s famous phrase of building bridges across all divides when he said “I have become all things to all people” for the sake of the Gospel so he may bring some of them to repentance. In order to reach out with the Gospel of salvation to as many as he could, the Apostle had forgone his rights, freedom and

privileges to all manner of people in Corinth to have as many as he could save from the bondage of sin. Paul endured all insults, name calling, beatings, hunger, cold, trekked the length and breadth of the Roman roads, was on sea day and night all for the sake of the Gospel. Paul contextualised and adapted to different cultures so that by all possible means he might save some, (1Cor 9:22c). Gilliland observed that “the missiological significance of contextualization is that all nations must understand the word and as clearly and as accurately as did Jesus own people in his day (227). The key concerns of missiology are the concern to allow the gospel to take shape differently in different contexts. For Paul his ultimate goal for evangelism was for salvation of those who believed in Christ through his message.

V23a. πάντα δὲ ποιῶ διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, Paul is categorical on why he does what he does. It is “for the sake of the Gospel,” V. 23. Paul’s strategy of flexibility and adaptability to all cultures explains the rationale for his apparent behaviour of reaching out to all people. This rationale is for the sake of the gospel which manifested in the inherent blessings that awaited him as he fulfilled his mandate and seeing the results of people being saved from their sins from all cultures.

V23b. Paul’s synthesis

ἵνα συγκοινωνὸς αὐτοῦ γένωμαι. (1Co 9:23)

First, Paul wants to be an active co-participant συγκοινωνὸς in the work of reaching out with the gospel of Christ. For as he puts it “Ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστὸς, for to me to live is Christ,” (Phi 1:21). This informs why Paul is determined on “winning souls for Christ so that he would share in its blessings. Daube observes that the subjunctive aorist active verb, *kerdeso*, rendered, “I might win” appears five times in vv19-22 and it is related to conversion (1Pet 3:1), and or winning a faltering believer (352-361). The word is also used in business cycles in relation to profit making. Blomberg corroborates that “the main thought of verses 19-23 is essentially captured six times by the verb *kerdeso*; “to win” (1Corinthians Application Commentary 183). He continues that the subjunctive verb is used in religious and business cycles meaning to “win”, to “gain” or to “make profit” or to save “as many as possible as reflected in

v.19, the more; v. 20a, the Jews; vs 20b, those under the law; v. 21, those not having the law; v 22a, the weak; v 22b, save some. Explaining further, Gardener, posits that the verb “win” means conversion and entry in the community of believers (99). It may also mean the continual process of winning people from their weak faith into deeper and mature Christian life (Matt 18:15). The verb win also applies to profit oriented businesses (Mat 25:16, 17, 20). According to Daube, the context of the verb “win” implies humility employed as an object for conversion (348-350). For Thiselton, the verb win stated six times to different groups shows Paul as expounding the principle of “accommodation” and “flexibility” as his strategy for missions (702). Paul deliberately uses the verb “to win” to draw attention to his earlier comment concerning his reward in 1Cor 9:17-18 for preaching the word, to which he affirms that his profit comes from spreading the Gospel among Jews and Gentiles.

Paul’s Synthesis 1Cor 9:23: “to win for Christ” is analysed in the phrases below:

- a. ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω· (1Cor 9:19)
- b. ἵνα Ἰουδαίους κερδήσω· (1Cor 9:20)
- c. ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον κερδήσω· (1Cor 9:20)
- d. ἵνα κερδάνω τοὺς ἀνόμους· (1Cor 9:21)
- e. ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω· (1Cor 9:22)
- f. ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω. (1Cor 9:22)
- g. ἵνα συγκοινωνὸς αὐτοῦ γένωμαι. (1Cor 9:23)

Daube observes that the subjunctive aorist active verb, *kerδήσω* rendered, “I might win” appears five times in vv19-22 and it is related to conversion (1Pet 3:1), and or winning a faltering believer (352-361). The word is also used in business cycles in relation to profit making. Blomberg corroborates that “the main thought of verses 19-23 is essentially captured six times by the aorist subjunctive verb *kerδήσω*; “I might win” (1Corinthians Application Commentary 183). This subjunctive verb is used in religious and business cycles to imply; to “win”, to “gain” or to “make profit” or to save “as many as possible as reflected in v.19, the more; v. 20a, the Jews; vs 20b, those under the law; v. 21, those not having the law; v 22a, the weak; v 22b, save some. Gardener, posits that the verb “win” means conversion and entry in the community of believers (99). It may also mean

the continual process of winning people from their weak faith into deeper and mature Christian life (Mat18:15). The verb win also applies to profit oriented businesses (Mat 25:16, 17, 20). According to Daube, the context of the verb “win” implies humility employed as an object for conversion (348-350). Thiselton argues that the subjunctive verb “might win” stated six times to different groups shows Paul as expounding the principle of “accommodation” and “flexibility” as his strategy for missions (702). Paul consciously uses the subjunctive to draw attention to his earlier comment concerning his reward in 1Cor 9:17-18 for preaching the word, to which he affirms that his profit comes from spreading the Gospel among Jews and Gentiles. The motif Paul becomes all things to all people is for the sake of the Gospel in order to share in its blessings in vs. 23. For African church leaders and Christians Paul’s motifs for the sake of the gospel and the blessings derived therefrom, ought to be the ground norm, magna charter of their relationship with Christ and humanity. The researcher intends to close this narrative by observing that there is a common thread that binds vv. 19- 23, thus making make it a unitary whole. It is established therefore that there is a nexus between vs, 19 and vs. 23.

Theology of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul essentially deals with ἐλεύθερος, “free,” which is the freedom of the Christian for the service to God. Freedom is one of the fundamental ideas of his theology. His other theologies are focused on grace, justification by faith, salvation, sanctification, reconciliation among others. In context, Paul simply never speaks of freedom in the philosophic sense of freedom of the will. Neither does he mean freedom in the social and political sense. Paul’s freedom in this context is to be appreciated in consonance with ‘freedom from sin,’ ‘freedom from the law,’ ‘freedom from death’ which is the result of sin etc. This is because all who sin are in bondage to sin and death and therefore need to be freed from the bondage of sin by the Word. The cardinal principles of Paul’s religion, are grace and faith, the Spirit, and union with Christ. Christianity is for Paul the religion of liberty to serve God. Christ makes a believer free; this idea is ever and again

repeated in different words, and may almost be taken as the central motive of Paul’s message. Paul thinks of the Christian as released from all earthly bonds. There can, indeed, be no true liberty which is not founded on Paul’s conception of man as a spiritual being, who lives in this material world but is subject to another, and who cannot, therefore, accept any earthly authority as final.

The theme of “freedom,” particularly stands out during the stormy days of the Galatian trouble and the Jerusalem conference. It also resurfaces in the Corinthian church where Paul deals with the issue of abuse of their rights and freedom. That freedom is not just a passing phase of Paul’s view. It occurs as a dominant theme in Galatians, Corinthians and Romans. It is pertinent to note that the concept of freedom in Paul’s thought is, the starting point of his religious thought and the conviction that he has been delivered from all earthly bonds. Paul’s conversion experience is a crucial factor in the development of all of his theology, and has a particular bearing on his doctrine of freedom. The Apostle boldly speaks fervently on freedom because he knows himself to have been set free by the Christ who rescued him on the Damascus road for a mission to the Gentiles.

Finally, Paul’s conflict with the Judaizers has to do with the issue of freedom from legalism. While the apostles led the preaching of the doctrine of Christian freedom before Paul, it is Paul who leads the battle against the resurrection of legalism within the Church, and so it is Paul who is called upon to formulate and defend the principles underlying his gospel of freedom. It is in the crucible of conflict that Paul’s emphasis upon freedom comes most clearly into focus, as the Galatian epistle illustrates. It is Paul’s teaching that Christians are delivered from wrath, sin, death, the powers of darkness, and the devil. This then becomes the melting point where sound missionary practice precedes. “Freedom from” and “freedom for” are concepts that should be embraced by the missionary simultaneously. One is freed from sin by the death of Christ on the Cross, thus the wrath of God, and death as a result of sin no longer have any hold on him. His freedom is for the service of Christ.

Implications of 1Corinthians 9:19-23 for the Church in Africa

Paul's dialectics on freedom and slavery in 1Corinthians 9:9:19-23 has many implications and can impact mission work in Africa in several ways:

- a. Contextualisation: Paul's approach demonstrates the importance of contextualization and cultural adaptation to African mission work. By adapting to local cultures and contexts, missionaries can more effectively communicate the gospel and build relationships with the people they serve.
- b. Flexibility and humility: Paul's willingness to surrender his rights and privileges for the sake of the gospel is a powerful example for African Christians to leverage on. In doing this though, there is the need to strike a balance between the needs of the missionary and affordability of the church so the church is not overburdened. Blomberg (181) rightly pontificates that While Christian leaders have a right to earn their living by the gospel (9:1-12a, 13-14), they dare not demand this right. Indeed, if it causes a potential scandal-for example, the accusation of preaching for the wrong motive, they should minister free of charge and provide for their material needs in other ways, as Paul himself did (vv12b, 15-18). This suggestion is given at the backdrop of the itinerant philosophers and the religious teachers in the Greco-Roman who often charged for their services, and thus Paul wants to have nothing to do with this misperception of his ministry.
- c. Servant Leadership: when Paul submits that he is a slave to all, he is promoting servant leadership style. This is a model that African church leaders ought to emulate as they prioritize the needs of others and the gospel. This way they will be to win many souls for Christ. In addition to servant leadership, there is the need to empower local leaders to contextualize the gospel in the different communities even as Paul adapted and was flexible in dealing with the various cultures he came in contact with.

- d. Cultural Sensitivity: Paul's approach highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity in mission work. By understanding and respecting local African customs and traditions, African missionaries can avoid cultural imperialism and build stronger and effective relationships with the people they serve.
- e. Incarnational ministry: Paul's willingness to "become all things to all people" (1Cor 9:22), reflects an Incarnational approach to ministry, where missionaries seek to embody the gospel in their interactions with others.
- f. From Nigeria to Africa to the world. Paul's missionary model is an inspiration for African church leaders to engage in mission beginning with local cultures and extending these to the West where Christianity is gradually fizzling out.

This all-time potent strategy of missions is apt for the African missionary. Paul's accommodation principle has zero tolerance for watering down the gospel truth, neither does it soft pedals its ethical demands in order to compromise its absolute monotheism. Paul does not modify the message of Christ to make it less scandalous to the Jews or less foolish to the Greeks. This view is shared by Garland, when he posits that the preacher of the changeless Gospel adapted himself to the changing cultures in seeking the ultimate welfare, and the salvation of these people (436). This is the arduous task placed at the doorstep of the African missionary, namely, to adopt the principles of flexibility, accommodation and integration with the other cultures for the propagation of the Gospel. This implies that the gospel be navigated seamlessly to the various cultures taking cognisance of their cultural milieu in the regions beyond by African missionaries.

Application of Paul's Dialectics to African Church Mission

Paul's dialectics on freedom and slavery can be applied in various ways such as:

- a. Partnering with local churches: African missionaries can partner with local churches

and organisations, recognising the importance of local leadership and context.

- b. Adapting to local cultures: African missionaries can seek to understand and respect local cultures, adapting their approach to fit specific context.
- c. Empowering local communities: By embracing servant-like attitude and empowering local communities, African missionaries can help build capacity and promote sustainable development. Thus by embracing Paul's dialectics on freedom and slavery, missionaries in Africa can build sustainable relationships, promote cultural sensitivity, and advance the gospel in a way that is both faithful to scripture and sensitive to local contexts.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The free Message of the Cross is indeed free for all cultures, even as it is reconciliatory and transformational in character. Its trajectory demands understanding Paul's dialectics on "freedom" and "slavery" for a desired synthesis of "winning" all for Christ. Paul's dialectics in context transcends humanistic definitions of freedom and slavery, and delves into the metaphysical realm of these concepts. The paradox of the believers' "freedom," is to be "slaves" for Christ for the sake of the gospel; slaves to righteousness and not to continue being slaves to sin. It behooves on the African Christian to be abreast with Paul's dialectics of freedom and slavery to be able to deliver contextual message of the Cross to the various cultures in Africa without being exclusive to the sending missionary cultures. This can only be achieved by adopting the principles of accommodation, integration and flexibility to all cultures for transformation to be realised. Failure in understanding, and the right application of these "missionary mix" will result in conforming to worldly philosophy, rather than the desired transformation of the sinner, a teaching that is anathematic to Paul's, (Rom 12:2). This missionary mix include among others; the "right message," delivered to the "right culture," using the "right channel of communication" at the "right time." This implies for instance the use of information and

communication technology through social media platforms in addition to conventional channels of communication to not only reach out to all nooks and crannies with the gospel, but to also guide and protect missionaries from the terrorist attacks, kidnappings for ransom and the persecution of Christians occasioned by the high level of insecurity in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

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