

# Missional tenet with incentive intent of and for witness study of 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

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Christ's law of selfless and sacrificial love is the missional principle, an incentive intent not only of and for handling disputable matter, including a matter of eating the food that is offered to the idols (cf. 1 Cor 8:1–11:1) but also of and for gospel witness there and then, in the early Church and also here and now, in the recent church as it always is, given the missional history of the church. Using the grammatical-historical method of exegesis, this article is set out to highlight the significance, purpose and application of the Christ's law of love as a missional tenet, which serves as incentive, which is an intent of and for gospel witness.

**Contribution:** Christ's law of love ensures a check and balance between being in the world without being of the world, to avoid compromising the gospel core message and being out of the world without being withdrawn from the world, to avoid rendering the gospel witness a zero impact within and outside a polarised multicultural faith community of South Africa and beyond.

**Keywords:** missional tenet; incentive intent; missional witness; exegesis; 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.

## Introduction

### Beliefs, Thoughts, Actions, Results

Psychology scholars<sup>1</sup> generally agree on the view that the results (outcomes) of the actions taken are mostly determined by the belief system that moves one's thoughts and potentials into action process. Reading some of their work and revising the article that the researcher wrote, inform and influence the writing of this article. The main question that this article is set to answer is as follows: What makes the goal realistic, worthwhile, crucial and compelling? Using the grammatical-historical method of exegesis, this article is set out to highlight the significance, purpose and application of the Christ's law of love as a missional tenet, which serves as incentive that is an intent of and for gospel witness.

## The significance of Christ's law in 1 Corinthians 9:21b

'Church is placed in the center of the history of the whole human race ... As Christ was in the midst of men, so too His Church, in the midst of people. As Christ assumed a real human nature so too Church takes to herself fullness of all that is genuinely human wherever/however she finds it/transforms it into a source of supernatural energy.' (cf. Pius XII's contention in *Luzbetak* 1988:70)

### Christ's law is significant as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 9:21b

In 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 (cf. Diagram 1), Christ's law of love is uncovered as the central message with an incentive intent of and for gospel witness. Christ's law of love is illustrated using a chiasmatic parallelism method. In Diagram 1, five pairs of phrases run parallel with each other (A/A.1, B/B.1, C/C.1, D/D.1 and E/E.1). The second phrase in each pair (A.1, B.1, C.1, D.1 and E.1) explains or clarifies the first phrase (that is A, B, C, D and E). The biblical passage, 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 forms a unit that begins with verse 19, where Paul says, 'he became all men'. The centre of the passage is verse 21b (cf. Diagram 1, E.1., v. 21b) 'Though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law'. The passage culminates in verse 23 where he concludes that he has done it all for the sake of the gospel that he may participate in witnessing or preaching the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

1. Bandura (2006); Dweck (2016); Rader (2005); Zimmerman (2013).

2. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 confirms the three-fold purposes of mission, which Johan H. Bavinck (1960:155) adopted (cf. Jongeneel 1997:83; Verkuy 1978:181), namely (1) conversion, that is to win (gain) and ultimately to save (κερδήσω) as many unbelievers as possible, both the Jews and the Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor 9:22; Hays, 1996:155; O'Brien 1995:95), (2) Church planting and (3) to glorify God (cf. 1 Cor 10:31; Fee, 2001:201).

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**GREETINGS**

**1 Corinthians 1:1–3:** Paul, ... an apostle of Christ Jesus ... **to those sanctified** in Christ Jesus ..., **Grace and peace** to you ....

**THANKSGIVING**

**1 Corinthians 1:4–9:** Paul's **testimony on Christ in them:** God who called them into **fellowship with His Son** is faithful

**LETTER BODY (main theme)**

**1 Corinthians 1:10–6:20:** Paul addresses many problems from the dominant theme-**Christ rules the Church's practical life**-Coetzee 1995:35.

**LETTER BODY** Main sub-themes (cf. Coetzee 1995:36–38)

**(A) 1 Corinthians 1:10–6:20:** Church's problems Chloe's household-on divisions (1:10–4:17) & fornication (4:18–6:20);

**(B.1) 1 Corinthians 7:1–10:33:** Church's ethical problems as reported in the letter sent by the church:

**Questions & Answers**

**(B.1.1) 1 Corinthians 7:1–40: Question no.1:** May we marry or not?

**Answer:** Retain your God-assigned place – **7:17, 22f; 25, 35 & 39**

**(B.2.1) 1 Corinthians 8:1–13: Question no.2.** May we eat meat offered to idols?

**Answer:** Yes (only God is **8:6 & No** loving the weak – **8:11**)

**(B.3) 1 Corinthians 9:1–27: Question no.3:** Will I accept remuneration as an

Apostle? **Answer:** No! Though the Lord determined it so: **9:14**

A. For though I *am free* and belong to no man

B. Yet I make myself a **slave to everyone** to win as many as possible (v. 19)

C. **To the Jews** I became like a Jew to win the Jews (v. 20a)

D. **To those under the law** I became like those under the law to win those under the law (v. 20c)

E. (Though I myself *am not under the law*), (v. 20b)

E.1. (Though I am not free from God's law *but am under Christ's law*) (v. 21b)

D.1. **To those not having the law** (v.20d) I became like them without the law to win to under the law. (v. 21c)

C.1 **To the weak** (v. 22a) I became weak (v. 22b) to win the weak (v. 22c)

B.1 I have become **all things to all men** (v. 22d, to save as many as possible (v. 22e)

A.1 I do all this **for the sake of the gospel** that I may share in its blessings (v. 23b).

**(B.4.) 1 Corinthians 10:1–33: Question:** Are idols alive? **Answer:** They are nothing; but do not serve demons behind idols-**10:19–22**

Source: Muswubi, T.A., 2017, Reflection of glocal worshiping in missiology in the context of the marginalized, yet never silenced, African worship music.

**DIAGRAM 1:** Chiastic structure of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 as centre of the letter body.

### Christ's law in 1 Corinthians 9:21b confirms and fulfils the biblical intentions of the law

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength' (cf. Dt 6:5). Love your neighbor as yourself (cf. Lv 19:18b). 'Don't oppress a foreigner, for you well know how it feels to be a foreigner since you were foreigners yourselves in the land of Egypt' (cf. Ex 23:9).

There is an interesting discussion of the nature of Christ's law. This article is of a view that only in Christ is the whole law embodied, revealed and expressed. The whole law's intention from the Old and New Testament is hanged, depended on and fulfilled in Christ. Its content is summed up by two sides of love, namely, to love God and to love others (cf. Lv 19:18,34; 25:44ff Dt 6:5; 10:19; Campbell 2003:60). This serves as the context within which to understand Christ's law (cf. Diagram 1, E.1., v. 21b). Christ's law is an incentive of and for gospel<sup>3</sup> preaching (cf. 1 Cor 9:12b, 19–23; 10:33).

**The Christ's law serves as an incentive of and for missional witness:** 1 Corinthians 11:1 sums up the parenthetical phrase of Christ's law of love in 1 Corinthians 9:21 and urges the

3.The gospel that Paul preaches is stated in 1 Corinthians 8:11 that it is God the Father who sent His Son Jesus Christ to this world to live and die for our sins. It is this gospel that he said he preaches actively and without a choice (cf. 1 Cor 9:16–17).

church<sup>4</sup> to imitate and follow it. Christ came into the world and assumed flesh by being born and raised in the Jewish culture to contextualise and communicate His message in human form, as the only begotten son of God, by conscious, deliberate and voluntary submission of His divine qualities without sin (cf. 2 Cor 4:8–5:10; Phlm 2:4–8; Bevans 1992:30; Combes 1998:77; Davids 2005:451; Engel 1983:93; Horrel 2003:68; Nicholls. 1987:101; Schreiter 1985:7; Van der Meer 2001:16). Therefore, Christ's law of love is manifested in His self-emptying, self-lowering and self-humbling for the sake of others (cf. Jn 13:34; 14:15, 21, 23; Rm 6:14, 13:8; Gl 3:21, 5:14, 18, 6:2; Tt 2:11–14; Heb 12:28, 5:14; Ja 1:25, 2:8, 12). Paul radicalises the law in a unique way as eternal moral principles rooted in, fulfilled by and summarised in the Christ's law of selfless life and love for others (cf. Lv 19:18; Rm 13:10; Gl 5:13f).

**The Christ's law also indicates the sphere of and for gospel core message:** If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (Gl 5:18).

E. (Though I myself *am not under the law*), (v.20b)

E.1. (Though I am not free from God's law *but am under Christ's law*) (v.21b)

**cf. Diagram 1**

In 1 Corinthians 9:21b, Paul indicates the sphere or realm in which the gospel core message is preached. The gospel core message includes the fact that we are saved in Jesus Christ alone [*solus Christus*], by grace alone [*sola gratia*], through faith alone [*sola fide*], living by the Spirit alone [*solus Spiritus*], according to His word alone [*sola scriptura*] and for God's glory alone [*soli Deo gloria*]. These core elements of the gospel core are not only above (transcendental and do not belong to one culture), but they are directed to and for (to be immanent to) all cultures (Lingenfelter 1998:38). The individual Christians and corporate Church are called based on these six solas and then sent to embody, share and communicate the same six solas and hence plant, build and multiply churches based on them despite their specific and distinct times and places (context). They are the keys and ticket to enter, to be in and to live in God's sphere of love and rule in ever-changing times and places (context).

## The purpose of Christ's law

### Christ's law demarcates the gospel core from the gospel covers

Paul uses 1 Corinthians 9:21 as the parenthetical phrase to clarify not only the demarcation (distinction) between the gospel core (message) and the gospel covers (culture) but also to address the confusion and misconceptions, including the dispute about the gospel covers, which are confused with the gospel core (message). In that regard, Paul used the parenthetical phrase in 1 Corinthians 9:21 to address the disputable matters (1 Cor 8–10), which include the two main contestations, namely, the issue of the controlled freedom (*πάντα ἐγκρατεύεται*) from 1 Corinthians 9:25 and the

4.Apparently, Paul offended the strong Christians at Corinth, whose flattering or sycophantic attitude and chameleon-like approach and behaviour to the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 2:1–5) undermined the weak Christians in the church about disputable (contentious) issues (1 Cor 8:7ff). For details on disputable matters (cf. Buys & Muswubi 2015:3–4).

uncontrolled freedom (πάντα ἔξεστιν) from 1 Corinthians 10:23. To Paul, the gospel covers (like culture elements, forms and symbols) in the multi-cultural people groups (whether from the West, East, Africa or Asia) are not commanded nor prohibited, and hence they are called disputable matters (Buys & Muswubi 2015:3–4). Instead of using the gospel covers as the carrier (transport), which will make it easier for gospel core (message) to be understood, they are viewed as the core gospel message. Confusing the gospel core and gospel cover leads to disputes and hence stumbling blocks (cultural bias that inhibits the ministry of the gospel to other multi-cultural people groups) (cf. Hendriks 2002:8; Richardson 1955:55).

### Christ's law serves as the framework of and for missional witness approaches

In 1 Corinthians 9:12b, 21, Paul pointed out the main incentive, namely, Christ's new law of love, all of which plays an important role regarding an individual Christian and to the corporate Church, namely, it serves as the basis or foundational framework of and for an individual Christian and corporate church's missional witness by words and deeds. There are at least five strategic approaches of and for missional witnesses, namely, (1) a personal approach, (2) a prioritised approach, (3) a purpose-driven approach, (4) a targeted approach and (5) a contextualised approach. It is important to clarify these missional approaches.

#### Christ's law and the personal approach

Griffiths (2005) writes:

He sets the statement in opposition to what follows, 'Although I am free, I have made myself a slave.' He uses the reflexive pronoun to emphasise his own personal willingness in all of it. He is saying, 'I have done this to myself.' (p. 2)

Personal willingness, involvement and experience as one's response to salvation by, encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ are one of the main tenets of the gospel witness. Paul in many places in his letters, including in this passage, uses reflexive pronoun to emphasise his personal willingness, involvement and experience as his response to salvation by, encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ. He applies it to himself. He used the word 'free' together with the word, 'I', 'Apostleship', 'rights', 'win' and 'Gospel' (cf. 1 Cor 9:1, 19, 21, 10:29f; cf. also Griffiths 2005:2). Paul is personally saved to serve. He does not serve to be saved. Based on his new identity and freedom in Christ, Paul has personally, consciously and has been motivated to choose literal freedom of movement for the spread of the gospel. He distances himself from his apostolic ministerial rights (1 Cor 9:1–6), which include remuneration by the church: that is, the right to make a living from the God-called ministry as stated (commanded) in the Mosaic law (1 Cor 9:7–13) and by Christ (1 Cor 9:14–15). So, Paul enslaves and sacrifices himself, not only to preach the gospel free of charge without ulterior or selfish human motives (1 Cor 9:16–18) but also to become all things to all people groups (1 Cor 9:19–23; Pratt Jr 2001:276).

#### Christ's law and the prioritised approach

In 1 Corinthians 9:12b, 19–23 and 10:33, Paul prioritises the gospel that he preaches. To him, the gospel is the gospel of Christ whereby prioritising and witnessing Christ is at the core of gospel message (cf. 1 Cor 9:12; 15:3). In this way, he distinguishes other messages and the core gospel message which pleases God. The latter is neither amended nor compromised to please his hearers (cf. 1 Cor 9:16). He prioritises the core gospel over disputable matters in the Church (cf. 1 Cor 8 & 10; Rm 14:13–23; Gl 5:11). Syncretism means mixing, blending, mingling or confusion of the two incompatible elements of the gospel core (message) and the gospel cover (cultural elements). The results of such syncretic tendencies are the compromising, dilution and/or changed gospel core message and Christianity's basic nature (identity and features) are dominated by idols (cf. modern idols like material wealth, health and prestige and/or traditional idol, like ancestor spirits veneration that are worshipped to appease God) (Hiebert 1999:382; Kraft 1979:6, 1999:390; Newbigin, 1997:7; Zvanaka 1997:74–75).

#### Christ's law and targeted approach

**Paul becomes like the Jew and all those who are under the Torah:** The Jews and the Gentiles are the two main targeted people groups that Paul ministered to in Corinth (cf. C/C.1. & D/D.1. in Diagram 1 above; 1 Cor 9:19ff; 10:31–11:1). Paul addresses all the people who are under the law or influenced by the law (or by tradition) who include (1) the ethnic Jews with the Torah (cf. Ac 13:46; 1 Cor 8:13; 9:20a–f & 22a), (2) the God-fearing Gentiles and proselytes to Judaism and (3) all the conservative groups with sensitive or weak conscience about contentious issues.

**Paul becomes all things to all men:** PaulPaul addresses those who are under the Jewish laws and traditions and the Gentiles who are neither influenced by nor follow the Jewish codes, like the civil, ceremonial (cf. Hebrew, Halachah הלכה) and diet codes (טענות cf. 1 Cor 9:20–22; Eph 2:12; Garland 2007:43). Paul regards these codes as shadows that have pointed to Christ and were fulfilled by His being, word and deeds (Col 2:16–17).

#### Christ's law and contextualised approach

**The gospel core message and culturally appropriate gospel cover:** The questions arose as to 'how far the Gospel should enter and address or answer the basic questions of the culture people group' (cf. Bosch (1991:433).

In addressing the recipients, Paul was driven by the love of Christ to be willing to lay his life in helping all kind of the people who are under the law like the ethnic Jews with the Torah (cf. Ac 13:46; 1 Cor 8:13; 9:20a–f & 22a) and the God-fearing Gentiles and proselytes to Judaism and also the conservative groups with sensitive or weak conscience about contentious issues. To Paul, there is a deeper relation between the gospel and culture whereby the biblically faithful gospel core and a culturally appropriate gospel cover are used to address the recipients' needs and challenges, including:

- The conditions of unjust system that produced hopeless, helpless, homeless, fatherless, childless, orphanages and abused and broken families, starving, poverty conditions) (cf. Pr 22:22; ed. Guder 1998:14,19).
- The idol worship that includes the modern idols like material wealth, health and prestige and/or traditional idol, like ancestor spirits veneration that are worshipped to appease God.

**Christ's selfless and sacrificial love and contextualised strategy:** 'While he was not under the power of anyone, he lived as if he had been subject to the inclination of all.' (cf. Calvin 1948:304)

Paul was free to operate both 'under the laws' and 'without the law'. He was flexible to observe both the Jewish and the Gentile customs, rituals and lifestyles. He shared the fellowship table with both sides to win over both sides without compromising the core gospel truth (cf. Garland 2007:43; Pratt 2005:22). Paul, the 'Hebrew of Hebrews', has Judaistic experience outside Christ (cf. Phlp 3:1ff; Rm 7:8ff; Ac 16:3; 18:18; 21:26). To illustrate that circumcision makes no theological difference, Paul circumcises the half-Jew, Timothy, but not the Greek, Titus, who is not influenced by Jewish law.

### Purpose-driven approach

'Because of the very nature of the gospel, we know it only as a message contextualized in culture.' (Padilla 1985:83)

The question should be raised: What moved Paul for many years of his missionary journey? What drove him to travel from place to place, visiting, living and working in Jewish and Gentile environments? In 1 Corinthians 9:21, it becomes clear that Christ's law that he imitates (cf. 1 Cor 11:1) moved and drove him. It was Christ's selfless and sacrificial love that moved Paul to become all things to all men. Paul's ministry he strategically identified himself with others and their cultures to get the gospel to strike root and make a real change in them (cf. Pratt Jr 2005:282). The next question is: What is the nature of this goal? From 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, it is clear that it was a realistic, worthwhile, crucial and compelling goal (cf. Cole 2010). It is a **realistic goal**, for it brings aroma of life to those who believe in Christ and an aroma of death to those who do not believe (cf. 1 Cor 9:22; 2 Cor 2:15f). It is a **worthy-to-follow goal** that Paul was willing to lay his rights to lead some to Christ and salvation. It is a **crucial goal**, for it is a choice with eternal consequences. It is a choice for eternal life or eternal death with unquenchable fire (Mk 9:43) and weeping and gnashing of teeth (Lk 16:27-28; Mt 8:12; 13:42,50:22:13; 24:51;25:30). It is a **compelling goal**. Paul indicated that he is compelled to preach the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 9:16). The sovereign God uses men and women who are compelled by the realistic, worthwhile, crucial and compelling goal to preach as His means to save His elect.

**TABLE 1:** Muswubi construction.

Three-fold goals	Missional witness plan is illustrated by:	Strategic output test is in the:
Immediate one.	<i>Ears</i> – we should earn the right to be heard.	<i>Preaching</i> – process-many responses.
Mediate one.	<i>Heart</i> – they should be exposed to the Saviour.	<i>Promised</i> – growth in 1 Cor 3:6-7.
Ultimate one.	<i>Hands</i> – they should share gospel's benefits.	<i>Partaking</i> in Christ's Sphere or reign.

### Purpose-driven approach and an immediate or urgent plan to win as many as possible

In Table 1, there is an immediate, mediate and ultimate missional plan illustrated. Missional witness process, including preaching and teaching needs wise strategy, which includes quick to listen ears of the text and context (cf. Mt 10; Ja 1:19), not only to earn that right to be heard but also to bring as many and diverse people as possible out of both God's wrath and Satan's stronghold into Christ and His sphere of rule (cf. Dn 12:3; Pr 11:25, 30; 1 Cor 9:19-23; Jn 3:36; 1 Pt 3:1; Rm 5:9; Thes 1 1:10; 5:9; Daube 1998:355-361; Karecki 1999:20).

### Purpose-driven approach and the mediate salvific approach so that some are saved

Gospel message is a:

'Prepared message for a prepared people.' (Richardson 1995:55)

'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.' (1 Cor 3:6-7; 9:22)

Missional witness by words and deeds involves suffering (cf. Paul was beaten, stoned, imprisoned and finally killed for the gospel of Christ) (cf. 2 Cor 11:23ff; Ac 9:16; 14:19ff). Our immediate efforts (planting and watering) to set a platform, to prepare and cultivate the soil, to spread and plant the seed following all that Christ commanded (cf. Mt 28:19f). Human immediate and God's mediate efforts are partnership team and organic efforts initiated by God to bring salvation, the spiritual growth of individuals, families and social institutions of the target multi-cultural people groups.

### Purpose-driven approach and the big picture: To be partaker in Christ's gospel

The overarching principle that guided his conduct towards those without Christ was the gospel. Paul wanted to be a 'partaker' of the gospel with the Corinthians. (cf. Calvin 1948:308).

Table 2 indicates the contrast drawn by Paul showing the moral implication that the victorious Christian crown is unlike the secular crown won by an athlete. An athlete would enter the competition in the famous Isthmian ancient games at Corinth, celebrated every 2 years and was expected to undergo rigorous training before the race. The best competitor would receive a prize as a symbol of victory. Christians aim for the heavenly holy victorious crown won already for us in Christ and hence put their body and spirit into subjection and live their lives temperately, with dedication and discipline to serve God in Christ, who has related with them, saved and called them (cf. Table 2 above, 1 Cor 9:24ff;13:1-3; Mt 7:21ff).

**TABLE 2:** Muswubi construction (based on 2 Tm 4:8; 1 Pt 5:4; 1 Cor 9:27; Rv 2:10).

Prize	Secular (prize) crown	Christian (prize) crown
Receiver(s)	The winner is the athlete (the fighter)	All Christians win and receive Christ-won prize
What prize?	In the form of gold, crown and/or glory	God-given salvation and eternal life in Christ
When? (time)	It is received at the end of the race	It is received at the end of this life – Christian's death
Its nature	Earthly, temporal and decaying crown	Heavenly, spiritual and eternal (it lasts forever)
What lesson?	The training of the physical body pays	The training (discipline) of godliness pays
Differences	Train and work hard to receive it	It is an already God-given prize-a motif to work hard;
Benefits	Benefits are only for this earthly life	Benefits are for both this earthly and eternal life

Source: Muswubi, T.A. A comparison of the secular and Christian prize or crown to be received

### Sharing the gospel's benefits in the present reality for the future hope

God guards the gift of salvation for the believers who have been chosen (Tm 2 1:12), through the love initiated by Christ (cf. Jn 1 4:7f) based on a life of thanksgiving and service in Christ (Tt 2:14; Eph 2:10). Their gratitude which is manifested in words and deeds, is done as a result of the gospel and for its sake (cf. 1 Cor 9:23). Christians as the recipients of the gift of salvation are responsible:

- To fix the eyes of faith on Christ and to direct their gifts and love to God.
- To eagerly strive for the prize: the spiritual reward, that is, an incorruptible crown of eternal life (cf. 2 Cor 9:24ff).
- To press on towards the benefits of the prize and its goal that is eternal life (cf. Phlm 3:12; Tim 1 6:12,17–19; Pt 2 1:10–11).

Such gospel benefits move them to missional witness designed around a clear goal. They must complete a race, which includes suffering, to attain the ultimate God-given goal (Phlm 3:8–11; Col 24–29), instead of directing their lives to the world and to forbidden bodily, fleshly and carnal desires (cf. Tim 1 4:16; Tim 2 4:10). They do this with the high hope that at the end of the race they will hear God, saying, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.' (cf. 1 Cor 9:23; Tim 2 2:10; 4:8; Pt 1 5:4; 10; Rm 2:7; Cor 2 4:17; Pratt Jr 2001:284).

## The application of Christ's law

Clearly, 1 Corinthians 9:21 (the Christ's law) plays a critical role, without which disputable<sup>5</sup> matters could hardly be handled, and missional witness could lack incentive to be done as indicated above. Christ's law of selfless and sacrificial love in 1 Corinthians 9:21 was used by Paul to handle the main contestation about attending ceremonies (festivals) in the pagan temples and eating meat sacrificed to

<sup>5</sup>The concept disputable is derived from the Greek word *διαλογισμων*. It refers to matters that are neither commanded nor forbidden by God (Warren 1991:2054). By their nature, disputable matters are just like scruples (cf. Latin word '*scrupus*' for rough pebble cf. Stott 1994:360). Morally, scruple is a small, unnecessary or peripheral cultural matters that are internalised in one's conscience and stored in the subconscious mind indiscriminately without distinguishing fact from fiction (cf. Mitchell 1993:20). These stored matters are then, operate powerfully and even irrationally via the subconscious mind. They have potential to stir up contentions and/or disputes, like eating food (meat) sacrificed to idols and attending ceremonies on certain holiday festivals in the pagan temples (cf. Rm 14:1b; 1 Cor 8:10–13; Van der Walt 1997:1,4).

idols (cf. 1 Cor 6:9–11; 8:11–13; and 10). The contestation is between the two main (extreme) Christian groups, the so-called strong-conscience Christians who are the 'liberal' or licence-oriented Christians and the so-called weak (sensitive)-conscience Christians who are the 'conservative' or legalist-oriented Christians. The liberal-oriented Christians have uncontrolled freedom [*πάντα ἔξεστιν*] by permitting disputable matters (cf. 1 Cor 10:23; Brunt 1981: 19–21; Gooch 1993:1ff). The legalist-oriented Christians have controlled freedom [*ἀντα ἐγκρατεῖται*] by forbidding disputable matters as they regard them as idolatry and hence idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9f; 9:25). But in both cases, the Bible is silent about it.

### Christ's law of selfless (sacrificial) love and a foundation for Christian ethics and witness

Christ's law of selfless and sacrificial love is an incentive that lays the foundation for Christian ethics (moral life) and for Christian missional witness (by words and deeds). Based on Jesus Christ's new commandment of love, apostle Paul preached the gospel and ministered in Corinth for 18 months, apparently in A.D. 51 and 52. The epistle named '1 Corinthians' is a pastoral letter written to a spiritually troubled church. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 is part of Paul's responses to diverse issues in the Church of Corinth and more particularly part of 1 Corinthians 7–10 (cf. Coetzee 1995:36–37).

Besides handling disputable (contentious) matters, including attending ceremonies (festivals) in the pagan temples and eating meat sacrificed to idols (cf. 1 Cor 6:9–11; 8:11–13; and 10), Paul defended himself against his opponents who raised many doubts about his authority as an apostle who had personally seen the resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:12; 3:2; 4:3, 21:4:3; 2 Cor 3:1–6; 10:7–10; 11:18; Phlm 1:15–17). In his defence [*ἀπολογία*], Paul highlighted his right as an apostle, including the right:

- To have a wife and to preach the gospel free of charge (cf. 1 Cor 9:4–6).
- To receive the remuneration (financial support), which is commanded by Mosaic law (cf. 1 Cor 9:7–13) and by Christ himself (cf. 1 Cor 9:14–15).

Paul continued to state that he did not choose apostleship as a career path or as a paying job – not for self-glory or praise like those who see the ministry as a vocational career linked to financial reward (cf. 1 Cor 9:17; Mt 23:5–12) but rather that Christ Himself called and compelled him to preach the gospel as a priority above all else. Paul also asks a series of rhetorical questions about himself and Barnabas, to which he expects a positive response (cf. 1 Cor 9:4–12a). The first four questions indicate Paul's defence in a sarcastic way (cf. 1 Cor 9:4–6). In short, Paul asks whether in their ministry, he and Barnabas do not have the right:

- To food and drink.
- To be accompanied, like other apostles, by their believing wives.

- To receive remuneration (financial support) for their work.
- To enjoy other related privileges.

These questions reveal the basis of the opposition to Paul in Corinth. Paul's critics felt that he was inconsistent or contradicting the truth. The main contestation is about the uncontrolled freedom [πάντα ἔξεστιν] (cf. 1 Cor 10:23) and the controlled freedom [πάντα ἐγκρατεύεται] (cf. 1 Cor 9:25). The strong Christians (cf. δυνατοί, 1 Cor 4:10; 8:1–11:1) are the 'liberal' or licence-oriented Christians who emphasise their freedom of conscience and knowledge regarding disputable (contentious) matters, that is, matters that are neither commanded nor prohibited in (cf. 1 Cor 8:1–13; the detailed discussion (Rm 14:1–15:13 of contentious laws, in Muswubi 2017:44–45). The weak Christians (cf. ἰσχυροί, 1 Cor 1:27; Rm 5:6) are the 'conservative' or sensitive conscience-oriented Christians who emphasise that attending ceremonies (festivals) in the pagan temples and eating meat sacrificed to idols (cf. 1 Cor 8) is idolatry and hence idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 6:9–11; 8:11–13). Christ's law of selfless and sacrificial love is an incentive that lays the foundation for Christian missional witness (by words and deeds) and Christian ethics (moral life) including preaching, contending and defending the gospel free of charge without hindrance.

### 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 offers defence for the priority of the gospel witness

'I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.' (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:23, NIV)

In defending privileges of partaking in the gospel benefits, Paul uses himself as an example, indicating why he deliberately and personally chooses not only to set aside his God-given apostolic right and personal freedom and rights in Christ to proclaim the gospel free of charge (1 Cor. 9:16–18, 23; Pratt Jr 2001:278) but also to sacrifice himself like a hard-working and self-disciplined runner and boxer (yet, unlike them, for the imperishable prize of eternal life – 1 Cor 9:24–27). To Paul, the gospel is the primary and central motive of Paul's self-denial initiatives (cf. Collins & Harrington 1999:352ff). He sees himself as the partaker, not the cause and effect of salvation, whereas the Sovereign God is the only cause and the effect of rebirth and/or the regenerate of those who are called by the gospel message (cf. Rm 8:30; Phlm 1:6; Ac 16:15). So, Paul urges the Church in Corinth to regard themselves as partners with God in spreading (advancing) the gospel of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:16–17, 23; 2 Corinthians 6:1).

## Conclusion

Based on Christ's sacrificial (incarnational) model, Apostle Paul gives up his God-given apostolic rights and freedom in Christ to preach the gospel. The text, 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, uncovers Paul's missional model and approach that is, (1)

personal, (2) prioritised, (3) purpose-driven (4) targeted and contextualised. Paul's missional model and approach are based on Christ's sacrificial (incarnational) model and law of love that Paul clarifies using the parenthetic phrases in 1 Corinthians 9:21. Christ's sacrificial love motivates Paul who in turn motivates individual Christians and the corporate Church to be missional witnesses. To do so, the following actions are necessary:

- To keep the door, open to communicate the gospel and look for opportunities to share the gospel with all and to win the people over and to lay a foundation for their conversion.
- To search and to find common ground by identifying culture elements to aid the recipients to understand the gospel and hence work within those acceptable socio-cultural laws, norms, customs, ritual ceremonies and practices such as circumcision, holy days, dress codes and diet codes (like eating meat offered to idols), especially when such laws and practices are contentious and neither commanded nor prohibited by Scripture.
- The Jews traditional or cultural laws are not a means to earn God's favour, but is the inward working of God's word and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to transform or circumcise the heart and life of true Christians and enable true inwardly circumcised Jews to obey His law of love. (cf. Rm 2:26ff; Watson 1989:461f).
- Lastly, the biblical basis for missional witness, the historical misconceptions, the gospel contextualisation, the missional witness efficacy and strategic guidelines for missional witness should be applicable anywhere at any time after including diverse multicultural contexts.

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T.A.M., is the sole author of this research article.

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