



[1 Corinthians 9:19-22](#)

(19) For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; (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; (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; (22) 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.

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Paul mentions five times here that he is trying to “win” different people, and in verse 22, he writes that he is trying to “save some.” This passage is commonly interpreted that Paul would present himself differently in various circumstances to win people for Christ; he became all things to all men in order to “save” at least some of them. This interpretation fits the general evangelical belief that Christians should do whatever is necessary to “win souls for Christ” and to get all manner of people “saved” before they die.

However, if that is what this passage means, then holy Scripture is broken (see [John 10:35](#))! Such a reading contradicts numerous other clear biblical statements. For example, in [John 6:44](#), Jesus says, “*No one* can come to Me *unless* the Father who sent Me *draws him*.” A little later in [John 6:65](#), He reiterates this: “. . . no one can come to Me *unless it has been granted to him* by My Father.” Without the Father providing an individual an approach to Christ, he cannot come to Him for [salvation](#). The Father must intervene first—human intervention makes no difference.

Acts 13 contains the story of Paul and Barnabas preaching to Gentiles in Antioch. Luke writes in verse 48: “Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And *as many as had been appointed to [eternal life](#) believed*.” Even though the apostles preached to many, only certain people believed what they heard because only they had been appointed to eternal life.

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[John 17:3](#) provides a basic definition of the eternal life to which some were appointed: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true [God](#), and [Jesus Christ](#) whom You have sent.” Eternal life, then, is not merely endless living, but is the quality of life that comes from having relationships with the Father and the Son—and only the Father determines who will have such relationships during this age. Those who are not appointed to eternal life now will have their opportunity in the second resurrection.

This parallels Paul's statement in [Ephesians 2:8](#) that [grace](#) and saving [faith](#) are both gifts from God. He is not beholden to give the faith that saves—that is why it comes as a gift only to some. In fact, in [II Thessalonians 3:2](#), the apostle says that “not all [people] have faith.” An interlinear Bible will show that the Greek contains a definite article—“the”—before “faith”: “not all have *the* faith.” There is a *specific* faith, but only those to whom God gives it have it.

Jesus declares, “Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the [kingdom of heaven](#), but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” ([Matthew 7:21](#)). Claiming Jesus as our Lord has no effect if He does not know us (verse 23), and as [John 6:44](#) shows, the Father determines whether a person can even approach Jesus Christ.

In [Acts 2:38](#), Peter speaks about receiving the gift of the [Holy Spirit](#). Then he says, “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as *many as the Lord our God will call*” (verse 39). But without that calling, the promise does not apply. Many verses mention God's specific foreknowledge, calling, and election of some and not others ([Acts 13:2](#); [22:14](#); [Romans 1:6-7](#); [8:28-30](#); [9:11](#); [11:2](#); [16:13](#); [I Corinthians 1:9](#); [1:24-28](#); [Galatians 1:6](#); [5:8](#); [Ephesians 1:4](#); [4:1](#); [Colossians 3:15](#); [I Thessalonians 1:4](#); [2:12](#); [4:7](#); [5:24](#); [II Thessalonians 1:11](#); [2:13-14](#); [I Timothy 6:12](#); [II Timothy 1:9](#); [Hebrews 3:1](#); [9:15](#); [I Peter 1:2](#); [2:9](#); [5:10](#); [II Peter 1:10](#); [Jude 1](#); [Revelation 17:14](#)). Clearly, God has specifically determined who will come into a relationship with Him during this age—and it is not everyone! The rest will have this opportunity in the resurrection.

If the scriptures are to remain unbroken, either all of these examples of God limiting salvation right now are wrong, or the common interpretation of [I Corinthians 9:19-22](#) misses the mark!

— David C. Grabbe

To learn more, see:

[Can We Win People For Christ?](#)

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