

Chameleon Christians

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[0:00] I have been recruited, so to speak, to fill in for my father while he is gone.

They are enjoying a vacation in the Smoky Mountains over in East Tennessee, and they are obviously spending time with their granddaughter, who is now their favorite in the family. I used to have illusions that I might be the favorite, but those were dashed when she came along.

So, this morning I have been asked to preach, and I have a message this morning.

And as many of you know, I just graduated recently from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I got a degree in Christian ministry.

And it's funny, at New Orleans, there's two schools of thought when it comes to preaching. There is the Jim Shattuck School of Thought, if you're familiar with him. He's no longer a professor at New Orleans, but what he taught is continuing on there.

[1:09] If you're not familiar with Jim Shattuck, you probably know who one of his most famous students is, and that's David Platt. If you've read the book *Radical*, David Platt's really a rising star in the Southern Baptist life.

But Jim Shattuck is a preaching professor at New Orleans, and he said that if you have not preached for at least 45 minutes, you have not begun to preach. And you need to get back up there and preach some more.

Now, that's Jim Shattuck's. On the opposite side, you have Dr. John Gibson. Dr. John Gibson is a dear, dear friend of mine. I count him a friend as well as a teacher and a mentor.

I had the opportunity to serve under him as his youth pastor for about a year. But Dr. John Gibson would teach us. He was the preaching professor for the undergrad side, and he would say, listen, that's all fine and good.

And he said, but my professor was Dr. Level. Dr. Level has several buildings at New Orleans named after him. And he said, Dr. Level would get up and he'd say, listen, if you've preached past 25 minutes, you need to sit down because you've preached too long.

[2:13] So I have these two competing thoughts. I'll leave it to you to decide which school my father lands in. But I have decided this morning to shoot squarely for the middle ground.

And so hopefully I will go somewhere in the range of 25 to 45 minutes, not over and not under. But I will warn you, I do get nervous when I get nervous. I speak quickly. And so we may be done in 15 minutes.

I don't know. But this morning, my text is from First Corinthians chapter nine. And if you'll go ahead and turn there. First Corinthians, just kind of set it up because we're going to begin in the middle of the chapter.

We're going to begin at verse 15. But to set the text up, you have to understand that obviously Paul is the one writing here and he's writing to a Corinthian church, a church that is in Corinth. Paul is the one who planted this church.

And so Paul is writing to these people and the Corinthians struggle with a real problem and that they are worldly Christians. They're just like the world around them. In fact, if you read through First Corinthians, you will find out that they struggle with a specific problem that not even the world around them thought was OK.

[3:25] I'll leave it to you to read about that. But basically, these are Christians. This is a church that is struggling mightily. And at this point, Paul is writing. And so far in chapter nine, he's discussed basically the compensation of ministers, those who share the gospel.

He's made the argument that those who share the gospel should be compensated for it. Now, he's not making the argument for himself. He makes it from Peter. You know, he says, has Peter not taken a wife?

Has he not received some form of payment for his sharing of the gospel? And so basically, he's making the argument for paid ministers. And so up to this point, he's made that argument. And then he kind of follows that sharing the gospel line and starts that in verse 15.

And I'm going to start reading there. And it says, but I have used none of these things, being the compensation he's talked about earlier. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case.

For it would be better for me to die than to have any man make my boast an empty one. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of. For I'm under compulsion. For woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

[4:28] For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward. But if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge.

So as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all. So that I may win more. To the Jews, I became as a Jew.

So that I might win Jews. To those under the law, as under the law. Though not being under the law myself. So that I might win those who are under the law. To those who are without law, as without law.

Though not being without the law of God, but under the law of Christ. So that I might win those who are without law. To the weak, I became weak. That I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men.

So that I might by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel. So that I may become a fellow partaker of it. Please bow your heads to me. Father, we thank you for your word.

[5:25] And I pray that it would not return void this morning. We claim that promise that you've given us. And God, I just pray that everything done here this morning, said here, would not be my words. And would not be my wisdom, God.

But that you would just speak through me. And prepare our hearts. And open our ears. So we would hear from you. And it's your awesome name I pray. Amen. So, this is a very familiar verse. All things to all people. Student Life Camp, the camp that we took the students to earlier this year, has a drama group called All Things to All People. It's a familiar verse. It's a very often misused verse.

Because sometimes we use it to excuse our behavior. Well, I've become all things to all people so that I may win more. I want to tell you this morning, this isn't an excuse for behavior. This is an excuse for evangelism.

This is the way that Paul shares the gospel. Now, as Southern Baptists, we love methods for evangelism. If you've been in Southern Baptist life long, you've probably heard of Evangelism Explosion.

[6:25] I went through that. You've probably heard of Faith, the evangelism method. Here, we do Grow. Grow is also a method that Baptists have made a lot of use out of. So we love these methods. And so I think it's interesting, and we should pay attention, when Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives a method by which he evangelizes.

I've entitled the message this morning, Chameleon Christians. You say, why chameleon Christians? Well, you could probably read the passage and see, you know, kind of a hint of why I said that, why I entitled that.

But basically, chameleons are a famous lizard. Everybody knows what a chameleon is. Because a chameleon has an ability to change their colors. Not a lot of things can do that in the world. But a chameleon does.

And basically, a chameleon can change its color based on its habitat. It can look different colors to blend in. It can be based on condition. Chameleons are the type of lizard that basically has to have the sun to warm its body.

It requires an external heat source. And when they're up in that tree, they'll actually turn the side that's facing the sun. When they need to warm up, they'll turn that side black. And the other side will be bright green or whatever color it needs to be.

[7:33] But that black will absorb the heat from that sun. So they change based on condition.

When they're emotional, they get excited. They'll change to brilliant colors. All kinds of, you've probably seen National Geographic pictures of it.

All kinds of reds and greens and blues. Chameleons are very interesting creatures. But the one thing a chameleon is always is a chameleon. No matter what color the chameleon changes to, it doesn't change the fact that it is a chameleon.

I think that's a fitting example. Because what Paul is saying here when he says, I have become all things to all men by all means. I may save more. He's not saying I've changed my Christianity. He's not saying I've changed my beliefs. He's not saying I've changed my doctrine. He's simply saying that he's changed in order to reach more. But he is still, at the end of the day, a Christian. He's still a Christ follower. We have to understand that before we dig into this passage. Because it's not an excuse to excuse bad behavior as Christians. It's a reason for evangelism.

[8:36] It's a method for evangelism. So, in preparation for this message, I kept in mind all the training and learning that I've done for preaching sermons, which is not a lot.

As you heard earlier, I have a Christian ministry degree with a heavy focus on ministry. Lots of ministry type things. And so my preaching classes, as may become obvious by the end of this message, are very few.

But anyway, preaching class. There's always the joke told, you know, what makes up a sermon? And I was always told that a sermon is basically these things. A sermon is three points, an illustration, and a joke.

Okay? And so I sit down, and I've done sermons before, not many. I would much rather speak to a group of students because it's my comfort zone. I don't make any grand claims of my preaching ability.

But, so I sit down and I think, okay, three points, a joke, and an illustration. Now, I will tell you this morning, I don't like telling jokes. I don't. Every time I tell a joke, it's like this polite laughter that's really embarrassing.

[9:43] I'm not like Wes. I don't have, you know, a joke for every situation. And so I don't like telling jokes. So immediately I sit down and prepare the sermon. I throw that out. And I say, I'm not going to tell any jokes. And so I sit down, and I'm reading the Word of God.

And I'm kind of diagramming the sentences and the paragraphs to try and get some points out of it. Now, they have to be alliterated as well, right? So they all have to begin with the letter. Mine are going to begin with R this morning.

So very easy to remember. And to my horror, I get done, and I only have two points. That wouldn't be a problem if it weren't for the fact that I already threw out the joke.

So I'm already short. Two very important factors in a sermon. And so this morning, allow me to step onto my student ministry soapbox for just a moment.

And if you'll keep your finger there and appease my desire for Bible gymnastics, please turn to the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy chapter 6.

[10:43] And I think I just want to say this one thing. Get on my soapbox for just a moment so that we can set the stage for the rest of what we're going to say. What I'm going to say.

My first point is this. We must share the gospel regardless of relation. We must. And this should be a familiar passage to all of you. If it is not, I encourage you to familiarize yourself with this passage. And so Moses in Deuteronomy is giving the second law. He's basically giving the law again. And he says, starting in verse 4 of chapter 6, It says, Dear people, this morning, we're talking about evangelism.

But before we can even dig into what 1 Corinthians chapter 9 says, you need to understand that evangelism, regardless of method, begins in the home. 100%.

That is the God-ordained method. And if we do not evangelize in the home, we cannot hope to evangelize throughout the rest of the earth. And so evangelism begins in the home.

[12:15] That is my first point. Regardless of relation, we share the gospel. Consider Timothy. I'm not going to ask you to turn there. 1 Timothy chapter 3. Now if you're familiar with that, you'll understand that he's laying down basically the guidelines for what it would be to serve in some function in the church, some office in the church.

1 Timothy specifically says overseers and deacons. If you turn to Titus, it's a similar verse, similar passage. It says elders. And one of the main requirements is that we manage our household well.

1 Timothy goes on to say, if we can't manage our household, how can we manage the flock of God? And so evangelism must begin in the home. I think it's striking.

Vodibachum is one of my favorite, favorite preachers. He is an incredible messenger of God. And he says it's very sad when the term preacher's kid has become synonymous with rebellion and bad behavior.

That is a sad testament. And so before we can go, therefore, like the Great Commission says, we must stay home for our families, for our husbands, our wives, our sons and daughters, for our grandchildren.

[13 : 30] We must stay home for them. And teenagers are not leaving the church in record numbers after graduating because we haven't hired enough youth pastors or pastors.

We don't have enough volunteers. It's not because of our programming or our budgets that they're leaving the church in record numbers. It's not because our message is not, you know, hip enough. It's not because we aren't dynamic enough communicators.

That's not why they're leaving. In fact, and hear me and understand me in this, teenagers are leaving the church in record numbers because we took the God-ordained method of evangelism in the home and placed it in the hands of ministers of the church.

And that sounds bad. You say, hey, you know, that's what you do. But Deuteronomy chapter 6 and Ephesians chapter 6, both would disagree. That is where evangelism must begin.

And so before we go anywhere this morning, understand evangelism, sharing the gospel, you must do it in the home regardless of relation. My second point this morning, if you're taking notes, is we are to share the gospel regardless of race.

[14 : 40] Back in 1 Corinthians, see what Paul says there. He says, for I am free from all men. I have made myself a slave to all so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew.

And then he goes on, he says, to those who are not under the law, I became as one not under the law. Well, what's he saying there? Well, obviously we know what a Jew is. Someone under the law is basically talking about a Gentile, someone who is not a Jew.

And so we must share the gospel, excuse me, we must share the gospel regardless of race. Now you have to understand, Paul comes from a very proud race. The Jewish people of that day were a little different.

The culture was different than it is today. The culture of that day, you're talking about God's chosen people. They have a whole book about them. The whole Old Testament is about them.

These are God's chosen people from Abraham. God tells, God himself tells Abraham, I'm going to make you a great nation. Your people will be uncountable. So this is a very proud nation.

[15 : 42] Regardless of the fact that they've been in exile. Regardless of the fact that they're under Roman rule right now. They're still a proud nation. And they have a very long nose. And they look down that nose on the nations that surround them.

This is the Jewish culture of the day. Now consider Paul. If you've been here on Sunday mornings for any length of time, you'll know that dad is preaching out of Philippians. In Philippians chapter 3, Paul kind of gives his credentials about why, if anybody is going to boast, and how good they are, Paul could do it.

And so Paul, not only is he a member of an incredibly proud, proud nation and race, he's also like the elite of that. He is a Hebrew of Hebrews. According to the law, he's blameless.

So this is Paul when he outlines his method. He's going to share the gospel regardless. Regardless of race. Regardless of his race, and regardless of the people he's sharing the gospel to, what their race is.

Now, most of us here, I would assume, are Americans. We are citizens of the United States. And in the United States, I am very proud to be an American.

[16 : 49] I count it very highly. Not only am I an American, I am, for the past six years, an American soldier. Now, I will not lie and tell you that I've done a whole lot of things as an American soldier.

I've mostly just trained. But I'm very proud of the fact that I'm American, and I do something that less than 1% of American citizens will do. I'm an American soldier.

My brother Matt's an American soldier. He's done a lot more soldiering than I have. I'm not ashamed to admit. But, I'm an American soldier. And one of the proudest things about being an American soldier is putting the uniform on.

And that sounds silly, but it's the truth. If you've served in the armed forces, there's a certain amount of pride when you put on that uniform. And I'll never forget, we were on alert several years ago. It was soon after Katrina.

There was another hurricane coming through that was supposed to hit Texas. And so, they put us and Mississippi on alert so that we might have to go down there and help them.

[17:46] And so, of course, at the time, I was working at a car dealership. I was selling Fords. I was a terrible car salesman. It wasn't that I couldn't sell a car. I just couldn't get anybody to buy it for any amount of money.

And so, I didn't make any money. I was the poor guy in a lot trying to chase people down. And so, I'm a car salesman. And I had to take the day off so that I could go up to the unit. And we just sat around all day. We sat there waiting for the go word.

Well, the hurricane hit. And they decided that the Louisiana and Texas National Guard were more than enough to handle it. And so, they sent us home. And so, on my way home, I realized, you know, I've got a couple calls I need to make about some vehicles that I'm trying to sell.

And so, I go by the dealership and I go back to my cubicle and made a few calls that amounted to nothing. It took me about five minutes to call all of my customers.

And so, anyway, I'm walking out. And I'm in uniform at this point because I've just come from being at the armory. And I'm walking out and Robbie stopped me.

[18:46] Now, Robbie was an incredible salesperson. It was a she, Robbie. She would sell 20 or 25 cars a month. She made hundreds of thousands of dollars selling cars.

And so, she stops me. Now, the thing about great car salesmen is they generally don't care about bad car salesmen. And so, it was a big deal that she would stop me. And she didn't really like me. She was kind of mean. I'm not going to lie. So, she stops me and said, Chris, come here and sit in my office. Because she had her own office because she sold a lot of cars. So, I sat down. I was like, oh, man, what's going on?

What is she going to say to me? And she says, Chris, you walk different. I said, I walk different?

And now, listen to your people. It wasn't because I was a believer that I walked different.

I was not living well at that point. But she said, you walk different. I said, what do you mean I walk different? She said, I don't know. I guess it's a uniform. You walk like a man.

[19:44] I said, what does that mean about when I'm not wearing the uniform? She said, oh, I've always thought you walked like a sissy. I was like, now, when I made a mental note, I was like, change the way you walk.

It was the most backhanded compliment I've ever received. On the one hand, I walk like a man. Thanks, I appreciate that. On the other hand, when I'm not in this uniform, which is at, what, 28 days out of the month, I'm not in this uniform.

Those other 28 days in the month, I walk like a sissy. That's probably why I don't sell cars. But I took away from that. Like I said, one, I started to pay attention to how I walked.

But I was proud in that moment, as silly as that seems, because I was wearing my uniform. I was proud to be an American. I was proud to be a soldier. Now, not long before that, I would travel to Mexico on mission trips.

And in Mexico, people had nothing. We would go to a little border town of Reynosa, Mexico. And I remember on the Thursday that we were there, we went to the town dump.

[20:49] And I'm thinking, why in the world are we going here? We're supposed to be doing back our Bible clubs. And as we drove into the dump, I saw homes in the landfill. And basically what these people would do is they went into the landfill and they moved aside all the filth and the garbage in a little, probably fourth of an acre lot and built up some ramshackle house.

And their day consisted, the moms, the dads, and the children, their day consisted of picking through garbage in order to find provision for themselves. You say, what's your point?

In a month, they made as much as I did in a week. And I only made \$6.50 an hour at that time. That was their monthly income.

And so when I get down and went to witness to this child there in Mexico, and I'm wearing super nice clothes because I didn't think we would be doing anything in the dump other than looking, oh, hey, there's people's trash.

I'm wearing these super nice clothes, and I have a wallet not full of money according to our standards, but according to their standards was incredibly full of money. And I get down with that child.

[22:01] Do I refuse to play in the dirt with them? Do I refuse to hold them and hug them? Or does the gospel compel me to become something I'm not?

Yes, I'm a proud American. The gospel compels me to sit there with them and get all my nice name-brand clothes dirty and filthy and love it. And so we must share the gospel regardless of race. And then finally, for my third point, we must share the gospel regardless of religion. Again, I've become all things to all people. To Jews, I've become a Jew.

To people under the law, I've become like one under the law. People without the law, I've become like people without the law. And I think the best example of this, now, when I say religion, I don't mean regardless of what faith group they belong to.

I'm not saying that, you know, if a Mormon comes by the house, that I need to go and put on a white shirt and a black tie and greet them at the door and be like, hey, man, you know, and try and fit in.

[23:14] I'm not saying that. When I talk about religion, everybody in the world is religious. Even atheists are religious. You're going to worship, either one, you're going to worship a higher power, or two, you're going to worship yourself.

It really comes down to that. That's what's going to happen. We are creatures created to worship. If we have to ascribe worth to something, it's either going to be inward, turned towards us, or it's going to be outward, turned towards something else.

I think an amazing example of this is Acts chapter 17. Acts chapter 17, Paul has gone to Athens, Athens, Greece. Now, this is one of my favorite stories.

I'll never forget growing up, we used to have this little book. It was like a Christian version of Where's Waldo? because we had to have a Christian version of Where's Waldo. But anyway, it was a Christian version of Where's Waldo, and I'll never forget one of the images on there that you had to find, whatever you had to find in those, I think you had to find like Bibles and stuff.

One of those images was the Areopagus in Athens, on Mars Hill. And there's Paul. I remember all these cartoony images, and it was really goofy looking.

[24:25] Now, I'll never forget, there was always this faceless statue on there that said, to the unknown God. It was an idol to the unknown God. And so Paul, I'm just going to read the first couple of verses just to set this up.

Paul, in verse 22 of chapter 17 of Acts, he says, So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects, for while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, To the unknown God.

Now, if you're familiar with Greek mythology, which most of us are, there's movies about it, several movies have come out recently that have absolutely butchered Greek mythology. There's all kinds of movies about Greek mythology.

You understand, the Greeks were incredibly religious. More religious than pretty much anybody. Maybe the Romans were just as religious because they stole all the Greek gods and renamed them.

But the Greeks were incredibly religious. They had a God for everything. They had a reason for everything. They had a God that carried the sun around. They had a God, if it was a storming, oh man, look at that lightning.

[25:33] Zeus is busy. If they had a flood or a tidal wave, Poseidon's angry. All these many, many, many gods. Hopefully, Ares is around when I'm going to battle because he's the god of war.

All these gods that they had, they were incredibly religious people. And even though they had managed to put a God in every situation of their life to explain everything that was unexplainable previously to their gods, they still were so religious that just in case, just in case they missed one, they got this altar over here to the unknown God.

Now, I have a very active imagination. I think it's partly because I played too many computer games growing up. But I have a very active imagination. I did a lot of reading too. I didn't just play computer games. But I can imagine Paul walking through Mars Hill and he's looking and I can imagine his heart is breaking when he sees all of these altars and all of these images and all of these idols.

His heart is breaking at the ignorance that surrounds him, at the heart cry of a people who need something to worship and have chosen the wrong thing. And then I see him walking up to the altar of the unknown God and I don't think his heart was breaking anymore.

I think he probably got a little giddy. He's probably like, oh man, here's my chance. These people have walked into my trap. I'm Paul, a great debater. And so Paul stands up when he sees this altar and he says, men of Athens, I observe you are religious in every respect.

[27:12] And hey, I noticed this altar to an unknown God. Let me tell you about this God. He made the world and everything in it. He is Lord of heaven and earth.

So, he doesn't dwell in temples made by human hands. He isn't served by human hands either because he gives life, he gives breath, he gives all things to all people.

He made Adam the first man and from Adam he made all the nations. He is the creator God and therefore he is in charge and in control of everything, every facet of our life.

He appointed the rise, fall and location of every nation and guess what? This God, this unknown God, he is not far from us.

He's not Poseidon hiding in the ocean somewhere. He's not Zeus sitting up on Mount Olympus shaking his head at all the little people running around.

[28:11] He is God, the creator God and he's not far from us and guess what? He sent his son so that all people everywhere should repent and place our faith in this God man, this resurrected Jesus Christ.

Paul shared the gospel regardless of religion. It wasn't that these people weren't religious because of these people who were wrong and instead of, and allow me my soapbox one more time, instead of this easy-believe-ism where he just approached him and said, hey, I don't know where you are in life, but guess what?

Jesus died, he loves you, I wish, and he was resurrected. Don't you want to be a Christian now? He didn't do that because these people had no knowledge of what Jesus did.

They had no knowledge of this unknown God and so he begins from the beginning. I don't know why we ever stopped beginning from the beginning.

I don't know why evangelism and sharing the gospel started leaving off creation and a creator God and the story of how he brought his people all through the Old Testament and the story of how he provided a substitute, a substitutionary death for us.

[29:35] I don't know why we stopped that and just skipped ahead to the end. I think that's why we have a lot of ignorance in our church today is that people don't know the whole story. And so Paul got down their level and shared from beginning to end, from creation to judgment with these people, with these Athenians.

He shared the gospel regardless of where they were religiously. Paul was probably, I won't even say probably, I firmly believe Paul was the most knowledgeable Christian to ever live.

There will never be anybody with as much knowledge as him. But he laid aside all of the doctrine and all of the heady knowledge that would have just confused these poor people and he shared the very, very basic tenets of our faith.

And that is the method that Paul used. We should too. We should share a gospel regardless of relation, regardless of race, regardless of religion.

And I'll end with this one last thing. It's funny in this passage that Paul doesn't give us an out. And he focused really on the end of the passage.

[30:50] But starting in verse 15 he's talking about sharing the gospel. And he doesn't give us an out. He says, basically, I share the gospel. If I shared it because I didn't want to, I'm a good steward.

That's simply it. Because I share it because I want to, I have a gift. But there's no, A, sometimes I don't share it. There's no, you know, I get scared and I don't share it.

There's two things. either as a believer you are called, you're called to share the gospel. That's the bottom line. But as a believer you will either share the gospel because you want to or you will share the gospel because you have to.

There's no middle ground. We are called as a people of God, as followers of Christ, we are called to share the gospel. In every facet of our life.

Thank you.