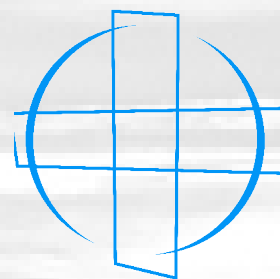


MAY
2025

Donald J. Wills
Senior Pastor

NEW



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to ***introduce*** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, ***instruct*** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, ***inspire*** them to serve for God's kingdom, and ***incorporate*** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Letter Coming Soon!



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned into your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30 am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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May 4, 2025



A New Body

1 Corinthians 15:29-58

Focal Verse:

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

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1 Corinthians 15:52

Introduce

The season I miss most from my time living in Kentucky is Fall. Every year from mid-October to early November, the rolling hills of dense deciduous forests became God's colorful canvas with brilliant hues of bright orange, dark red, and yellow as the trees began shedding their leaves. Like clockwork, this kaleidoscopic display of dazzling color rarely disappointed. Because of the process of photosynthesis whereby trees obtain some of their nutrients, the combination of cooler temperatures and less daylight causes the trees to go into a dormant state for the Winter, leaving an often gray and dreary landscape with bare trees looking dead. This cyclical process occurs in all deciduous trees—even here in North Texas, but usually with much less spectacular results.

Dotting the hills, however, occasional patches of green would contrast with the dull bark and branches of these leaf-less deciduous trees and barren hillsides

mostly devoid of any green vegetation. Conifer trees, which we would typically call evergreen, retain their vibrant green needles year-around—never completely entering such a dormant state. When everything else had either become dormant or died, whether grass, trees, flowers, or plants, the conifer



remains active and productive even though its rate of growth may slow somewhat. As a result, these conifer trees became prized as Christmas trees because of their lively and luscious appearance.

As long as deciduous trees maintain their current genetic form and properties, they will always repeat this cycle. They will lose their leaves every Fall and enter this dormant state with no growth. If, however, they could be transformed into a tree with the same genetic properties as a conifer, they too could retain their leaves and continue their productivity year-around. On their own, they can never achieve this feat even through years of so-called evolution or adaptation. They need someone who can transform them—namely the God who created them.

Introduce

For humans, death doesn't mean that we cease to exist or that we enter a state of nothingness; it doesn't mean that we simply fall sleep or become unconscious existing in some kind of a dormant state unaware of our surroundings. On the contrary, God has created our souls as eternal. We will spend eternity either in heaven with God or in hell separated from Him depending upon how we respond to the gift of life that His Son has offered us. But like a deciduous tree constantly repeating its yearly cycle, we cannot enter heaven in such a state where we cycle between the corruption of the flesh (sin) and the service of the Lord. Just as a deciduous tree cannot change its nature on its own, neither can we transform our sinful nature without God's intervention.

Like a conifer tree, however, God must change us through the resurrection of Christ into our perfect, eternal state in which we are forever productive. He must rid us of this cycle of corruption and decay induced by our sin and give us righteous bodies to use eternally for His glory rather than the sin of self-gratification which so-often characterizes our lives right now. When we have a relationship with Jesus, God will give us a new, physical body completely free from sin, corruption, and decay so that we can enter into this eternal realm spent with Him forever in heaven! And this is what Paul seeks to teach the Corinthians in chapter 15, giving them hope of a future, bodily resurrection where they too can enjoy eternity with God in heaven.

Key
Question

While we should strive for righteousness, how do you see this cycle of corruption and imperfection in your life right now?

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

THE FUTILITY OF LIFE WITHOUT RESURRECTION

To emphasize the futility of life apart from the resurrection, Paul continues his argument by presenting additional examples that expose the absurdity of the Corinthians' view. One of the most puzzling examples he cites, however, is found in 1 Corinthians 15:29 where he asks a rhetorical question and repeats it for emphasis: **What will they do who are baptized for the dead?** And again, **if the dead do not rise at all, why are they baptized for them** (v. 29)? Over the centuries, this verse has sparked confusion, created controversy, and has been misused by various groups, including cults like the Mormons, to support doctrines that contradict fundamental Christian beliefs. At first glance, Paul's example seems to suggest some form of proxy baptism—a ritual performed on behalf of those who have died. However, this would directly conflict with his own theology which stresses salvation as a personal response to God's grace through faith and repentance, not religious rites performed on behalf of others.

Before we examine the immediate context of this verse, we must pause to identify some sound interpretive principles which will help us better deal with difficult passages like this. Even Peter acknowledged that Paul, in his epistles, wrote "some things [which are] hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also with the rest of the Scriptures" ([2 Peter 3:16](#)). We must be just as cautious. Recognizing that some of Paul's teachings are challenging, we are called to approach them with humility through prayer and a reliance on the Holy Spirit to guide us to the truth—so that we, too, do not twist his words to our own peril. To guard against misinterpretation, especially of difficult or obscure passages like this, we should practice three essential techniques. First, we must depend upon the Holy Spirit, prayerfully asking God for insight and illumination that only He can provide. Second, we must consider the whole counsel of Scripture, seeking consistency with both the overarching context and the theology of God's Word. Third, we should use clear passages on similar subjects to interpret the obscure ones. By



practicing these principles, we can then approach challenging texts like this not with speculation or personal bias, but with regard to rightly dividing or handling the Word of truth ([2 Tim 2:15](#)).

Question # 1

When you encounter a difficult passage like this, what is the first thing that you do? What should be the first thing you do?

Over the years, scholars have proposed a variety of interpretations to explain this enigmatic verse. However, we must recognize that Paul employs this example rhetorically to help the Corinthians understand the illogicalness of their position. Nowhere does he commend or advocate vicarious baptism **for the dead** as a means of salvation in his other letters. To do so would undermine the sufficiency of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Salvation comes solely through the death and resurrection of Christ based on one's personal response to the gospel by faith and through repentance. Furthermore, such a practice finds no support in the rest of Scripture nor did the early church embrace it as an acceptable practice. Nevertheless, Paul's core argument remains clear: **if indeed the dead do not rise at all**, then even a practice like this—however misconstrued some may make it—is utterly pointless. Rather than focus on the practice itself, we must pay more attention to Paul's purpose behind citing it: the affirmation that Jesus' resurrection is central to the Christian faith which gives us hope of a future resurrected life spent with Him in heaven.

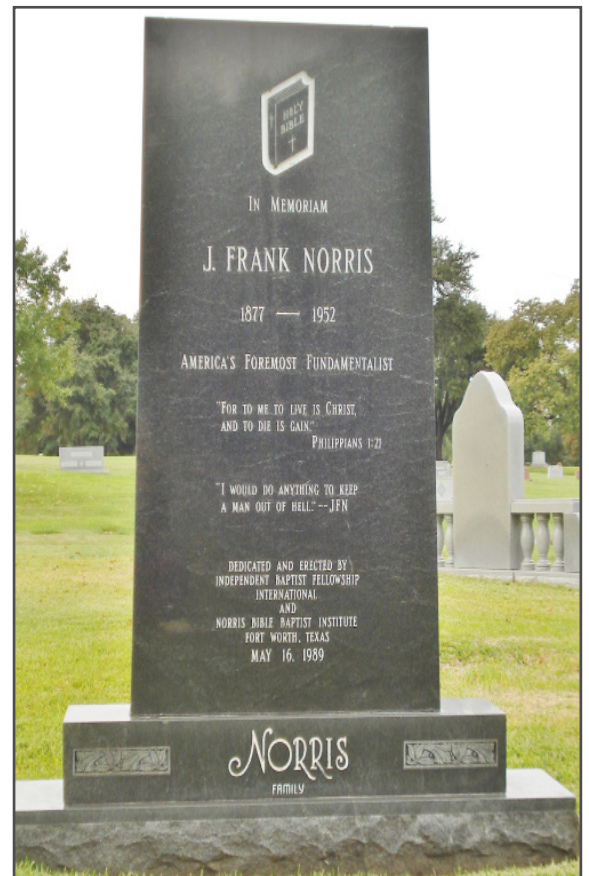
If some in the Corinthian church did practice a form of vicarious baptism **for the dead**, then why did Paul not outrightly condemn it since it would contradict the gospel? The heretical or corrupted practice of vicarious baptism seemed to begin in earnest nearly a century later than this letter. Most likely, errant Gnostics such as Marcion had misunderstood and misapplied Paul's words here in 1 Corinthians rather than it being an actual legitimate practice in the first century to which Paul is responding (see Tertullian *Against Marcion* 5.10). In fact, no historical evidence exists that either pagans or Christians practiced such a rite in the first century. So, whatever practice mentioned here didn't seem to cause Paul much concern especially since only a few participated and it didn't appear to detract from the message of the gospel.

When addressing wide-spread problems plaguing the church in this letter, like factions and immorality, Paul uses the second person plural pronoun (i.e., you all) and

takes a clear stand against their error, but here he uses the third person (i.e., **they**) likely to indicate that only a small portion of the congregation was engaged. If some in the church had participated in corrupt ritual such as vicarious baptism **for the dead**, Paul would have surely qualified his remarks since it distorts the message of the gospel. So, if the misunderstanding arose primarily a century later and no one in the church practiced a vicarious form of baptism **for the dead** in the first century, then what does Paul mean when he says **baptized for the dead**? Out of all the proposals, we will discuss only the two which have the most theological and contextual merit.

First, this phrase might refer to how the death of a loved one could motivate a person to trust Christ and be **baptized** because of the hope that the resurrection offers of a reunion in heaven one day. Based on the Greek structure, we could legitimately translate it as “they have themselves baptized on behalf of / for the sake of **the dead**.” This does not necessarily imply vicarious baptism, but could point to the influence of the dead as a motivating factor in a person’s decision to follow Christ. This interpretation fits seamlessly with both the way Paul grammatically structures the phrase as well as the logical argumentation he uses throughout the chapter. Thus, he includes this line of rhetorical questioning to cause the Corinthians to think, “Why would a person commit to Christ with the hope of seeing a loved one again in heaven **if the dead do not rise?**” Most importantly, this interpretation preserves Scripture’s portrayal of salvation through Christ alone, so Paul wouldn’t have felt the need to correct it. In fact, God often uses various circumstances and people to draw others to Him—why not the passing of a loved one?

For years, the family and members of First Baptist Church of Haltom City where his wife attended witnessed to Kenneth Wilson and prayed for him to accept Christ as his Savior. But every time they broached the subject, he showed no interest at all—always kindly dismissing their effort by saying, “It’s just not for me.” As the years continued to



pass, the Wilsons had a grandson who tragically died in a motorcycle accident. During a period of grief, Kenneth called the pastor and bluntly asked, “Is it true that I’ll get to see my grandson again if I get saved?” When the pastor answered affirmatively, Kenneth quickly replied, “That’s what I want to do,” so he repented of his sins and trusted Christ. From that point forward, Kenneth’s life radically changed. He diligently studied Scripture, prayed fervently, and served faithfully in the church. God had used the death of his grandson to motivate Kenneth to trust Christ which would culminate with a blessed reunion in heaven one day.

Question
2

What circumstances or people did God use to draw you into a relationship with Christ?

Second, throughout this section, Paul utilizes examples, including intensely personal ones, to underscore the danger that following Christ poses through persecution, suffering, and even death (vv. 30-32). Thus, some have proposed that Paul could be using baptism as a reference to suffering or even martyrdom for the faith. Jesus Himself, in fact, uses baptism as a metaphor to allude to His own suffering and death ([Luke 12:50](#); [Mark 10:38](#)), so Paul has a good company for equating the two metaphorically. In Luke 12:50, Jesus states, for instance, “But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished.” After declaring that the Son of Man must suffer many things and die, Jesus resolutely sets His face toward Jerusalem with His eyes fixed on accomplishing the Father’s plan ([Luke 9:22](#), [51](#)). Hence, using the metaphor of baptism, Jesus is obviously referring to His own suffering and death during His trials and upon the cross.

Along these lines, therefore, Paul could be asking, “Why are we persecuted unto death **if the dead do not rise?**” Thus, if there is no resurrection, his point is that they are needlessly putting themselves in danger for a false, pointless religion that doesn’t work—a point that he will make clear in verse 30. They are essentially throwing their lives away.

“And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?”

1 Corinthians 15:30

While this fits the immediate context of Paul's argument and adheres to the rest of Scripture theologically, it strains the grammar of the sentence. It doesn't explain why Paul would choose the wording "on behalf of / for the sake of the dead" instead of "unto death" if he intended **baptized** to function metaphorically in describing persecution or suffering. Therefore, it seems that the first option where the death of a loved one motivates a person to accept Christ has the most to support it. Furthermore, that interpretation fits the context best since it preserves the orthodox meaning of Scripture regarding both salvation and baptism, but it also explains why early heretical groups may have misunderstood what Paul was saying and misappropriated it within their practices.

Question
3

What risks, perils, or dangers have you encountered as a result of sharing the gospel? Despite those risks, how did God reassure you of the validity or truthfulness of the message?

To continue stressing his point about the futility of the gospel ministry apart from the resurrection, Paul poses another rhetorical question: **Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour** (v. 30)? Paul's point remains the same: **If the dead do not rise**, it's pointless for us to risk our lives for the gospel. This time Paul backs up his assertion with personal experiences. After all, from the beginning God had told him how much he would be required to suffer for His name's sake ([Acts 9:16](#)). For this reason, Paul reveals that he faces peril and death **daily** (v. 31). He can boast, however, that the Lord has used his ministry to bring salvation to the Corinthians despite all the hardship and persecution he faced ([Acts 18:9-15](#)). In fact, Paul makes a solemn oath (i.e., **I affirm**) that the Corinthians had personally seen how much he had to suffer in delivering the gospel to them! They witnessed it first-hand because they are living proof of God's grace and their salvation which led to their transformation was well worth any risk he had to endure.

Paul doesn't exaggerate or speak with hyperbole when he reminds them that he dies **daily**. He literally faced danger on every front as he disseminated the gospel. While ministering in Asia, probably modern-day Turkey, Paul reported in his second letter to them that "we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead" ([2 Cor 1:9](#)). Later in this same letter, he even catalogs all the peril he faced over his years of missionary work from lashings to being

Instruct

stoned and left for dead ([2 Cor 11:24-28](#)). If anyone could vouch for the power and validity of the resurrection, it would

be Paul. He had seen God's life-sustaining power and promises fulfilled time after time. If he had

To illustrate the extreme danger and relentless opposition he faced in ministry **daily**, Paul metaphorically speaks about his personal trials as if he had participated in the gladiatorial



games where condemned men fought wild animals to the death. Therefore, he asks, **"If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me"** (v. 32)? We know that Paul is speaking metaphorically here because as a Roman citizen he would have been legally exempt from receiving such a sentence and no legitimate historical record exists of Paul ever having been subjected to such punishment in Ephesus. Paul's point is that his motivation for continuing in the gospel ministry despite the hardship it posed came supernaturally from God rather than his own sheer willpower or determination as a man. Thus, the expression **in the manner of men** refers to human motivation in contrast to divine motivation. If he would have only had human motivation and no true conviction from the Lord, Paul admits that he would have already given up. What would be the point of enduring all these trials? None of the offers any **advantage** to him!

Question
4

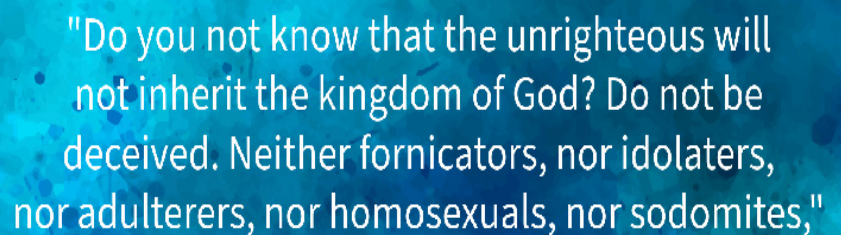
What motivates you in service of the Lord?

Human motivation centers around self-preservation and self-gratification. Generally, we participate in the things which make us feel safe and comfortable, affording us with a sense of security and stability. We tend to seek things which offer us with pleasure and provide tangible benefits. Oppositely, we avoid things that put us at risk or in **jeopardy**, especially causing us hardships. If there is no resurrection, therefore, human values tell us to **eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die** (see [Isa 22:13](#)). If

we only have this life to live, human wisdom says we should make the most of our time now. We might as well live hedonistically—seeking the things that bring us pleasure and happiness—for there are no consequences for our actions outside of the ones we may face in the moment.

Obviously, Paul isn't telling the Corinthians or us to live this way—to live recklessly without regard simply to fulfill our wanton desires. On the contrary, he is merely showing them the logical conclusion to their denial of bodily resurrection. Therefore, he warns them to stop being **deceived** (v. 33). Paul has already issued this same warning in 1 Corinthians 6:9 where he tells them to stop being **deceived** because those who participate in immorality “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” As a believer, life isn't some free-for-all where we can do whatever we want because we live under God's grace. Rather, life as a believer means that we have the responsibility to honor Christ by living righteously; we should imitate His character and not the that of the world. Thus, Paul pleads with them again here to stop deceiving themselves by living immorally and participating in debauchery as if there is no resurrection.

To connect with his audience and highlight his point about the danger of living immorally as if no one will rise from **the dead**, Paul quotes a line from the fourth-century play *Thais* by Meander of which only a few fragments remain: “**Bad company corrupts good morals.**” Earlier in this letter, Paul had already warned the Corinthians not to associate with



"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,"

1 Corinthians 6:9

sexually immoral people ([1 Cor 5:9-13](#)). Like a little leaven, the sin of a few affects the whole body of Christ. This same principle now applies to those who deny the resurrection. Just as they should disassociate with any sexually immoral person, they should also dissociate from those who deny bodily resurrection. The corrupt thinking of even just a few can influence others in the church to follow.

Parents often use similar reasoning when they teach their children the value of finding good friends. They should make friends with those who act with integrity and

avoid those who cause trouble. Guilt by association is a very real concept, but so also is peer pressure. No matter how strong we may view our own willpower to resist falling into depraved thinking or behavior, the bad habits of others rub off on us more easily than their good traits. Likewise, Paul warns the Corinthians of the same thing. They shouldn't hang around those who deny the resurrection or participate in immoral activity. If they do, chances are high that they too will begin adopting their flawed view and participating in the same degenerate behavior.

Question # 5

In what way(s) have you seen corrupt thinking or behavior influence a group of people who closely associate with one another?

Paul explicitly tells the Corinthians to wake up and stop sinning (v. 34). The phrase **awake to righteousness** actually means to sober up from a drunken stupor and return to clear, right thinking. In more modern terms, we would say “come to your senses.” Hence, Paul is urging them to return to a rational, reasoned way of thinking so they might fully grasp the necessity of the resurrection for the Christian faith and the profound impact it should have upon their lives—both now and in the future. In this context, the command to stop sinning refers more to the Corinthians' uninformed and errant views about the resurrection rather than an immoral action. By misrepresenting the resurrection—a central truth of the gospel—the Corinthians have fallen into a form of godlessness. They've sinned not through outward vice, but by distorting the central message of Christ; they have led others astray not by action, but by their ideology.

Those who deny the resurrection actually live in ignorance of God. Even though they may claim to “know” God and to have superior spiritual insight, their beliefs and actions betray them. If they actually knew God, they would fully recognize the implications of the resurrection for life right now. While Psalm 14:1 declares that “the fool has said in his own heart, ‘There is no God,’” so also Paul draws a similar conclusion here saying that “the fool acts or behaves as if God does not exist.” By denying the



resurrection, the Corinthians act as if God doesn't exist; they wrongly believe that this gives them the right to behave however they want without any consequence. On the contrary, the resurrection should become the basis for the life which we should live now and the one into which God will ultimately transform us to live with Him forever in heaven ([1 John 3:1-2](#)). Therefore, we ought to practice living in righteousness right now. Paul will now develop this theme of as he reveals what we can expect at the resurrection in the rest of this chapter.

Question
6

What impact has the resurrection had upon your life aside from the promise of a future life spent with God?

1 Corinthians 15:35-45

THE FUTURE BODY OF THE BELIEVER:

With a rhetorical technique known as diatribe, Paul argues with a fictitious "opponent" in anticipation of some of the Corinthians' objections concerning the bodily resurrection of believers. "**Someone will say**" could, therefore, be translated as some of you might object saying, "**How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come**" (v. 35)? Paul begins his response rather harshly with the exclamation, "You fool," picking up the language of the previous section concerning how "some do not have the knowledge of God." By denying the resurrection, they have become functional "atheists" in a sense. While they do not literally deny God's existence, they have misconstrued His Word and distorted the gospel which is just as bad because it displays their ignorance of Him.

If they would only open their eyes and "sober up," God has given them evidence in nature to help them understand our future bodily resurrection. Through the illustration of the **seed**, Paul demonstrates how God can overcome death to bring life. Thus, he reminds them that **what they sow is not made alive unless it dies** (v. 36). He continues to explain that the **seed** doesn't remain in the form of a **seed**, but is transformed into a plant according to the purpose which God had given it (vv. 37-38). Although we plant a single kernel of **grain**, whether **wheat** or **some other** type, it doesn't remain a "**seed**," but it sprouts into a fully-developed plant which Paul describes as **God giving it a body as He pleases** according to its own kind.

Instruct

Paul's illustration of the **seed** beautifully highlights two essential truths he intends to emphasize throughout the rest of this chapter. First, the resurrection requires transformation. We cannot continue in our current physical state, marked by sin and corruption. Just as the **seed** doesn't continue to exist solely as a **seed** but breaks down and sprouts into a plant, so too will God transform our current bodies into righteous ones free from sin in this future life spent with Him in heaven. Second, God performs the work of transformation on our behalf. No matter how hard we may try to overcome corruption on this earth, we can't. Even though we will all fail at times, we are still called to pursue holiness and strive for perfection. Nonetheless, only God can one day fully transform us into the people whom He created us to be in the first place—which He already has set in motion through Christ's death and resurrection as a foreshadowing of ours to come.



Question
7

Over the course of your life, what transformations have you already seen in the way that God has altered your behavior or thinking?

To underscore his point about transformation, Paul uses several analogies to distinguish between the properties and propensities of our current physical bodies versus our future spiritual ones. However, we cannot press these illustrations too far or we risk missing Paul's point entirely. Drawing from the language of creation when God made every living thing according to its own kind ([Gen 1:11-12, 21](#)), he reminds the Corinthians that there are different kinds of **flesh**—literally **all flesh is not the same flesh** (v. 39). Each living being has its own distinctive type of **flesh** or body: **mankind**, **animals**, **fish**, and **birds**. In other words, each creature has its own unique form and function that is perfectly suited for the environment in which God had placed it.

Continuing to apply the language of creation, Paul now switches gears somewhat to note the difference between **celestial** (heavenly) **bodies** and **terrestrial** (earthly)

bodies in anticipation of the new “spiritual” ones we will receive at the resurrection (v. 40). By **celestial bodies** he means the sun, moon, and stars (v. 41). Just like within the animal kingdom, these **celestial bodies** have different properties and functions than those beings living on earth as assigned by God according to His divine plan. Even among themselves, these celestial bodies have specific characteristics that distinguish them from one another which Paul calls “**glory**.” We generally use the word **glory** to refer to majesty or honor. But here Paul uses it to refer more to the splendor or defining characteristic that distinguishes one body from the other. We see this clearly in the last line of verse 42 where Paul explains how **one star differs from the other in glory**. Some stars, for example, appear brighter than others in the night sky while others, like the North Star, appear to have a “fixed” position which provide a reliable tool for navigation.

We must take Paul’s illustrations at face value and not draw our own theological inferences about what functions or appearances our bodies will have at the resurrection. Certainly, we can make a case that we will have a resurrected body similar to Christ’s since He is the firstfruits or precedent



of ours to come. Elsewhere, Paul even reveals that Jesus “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” ([Phil 3:20-21](#)). Others, at that time, will still likely recognize us by our physical appearance ([John 20:27](#); [21:7](#); [1 Cor 13:12](#)); Jesus could also eat ([Luke 24:42-43](#)), be touched and interact with people ([Luke 24:39](#); [John 20:27](#)), but He could also teleport from locations and enter locked rooms ([Luke 24:13-35](#); [John 20:19](#)). Yet, this is not Paul’s concern here with the illustrations He gives!

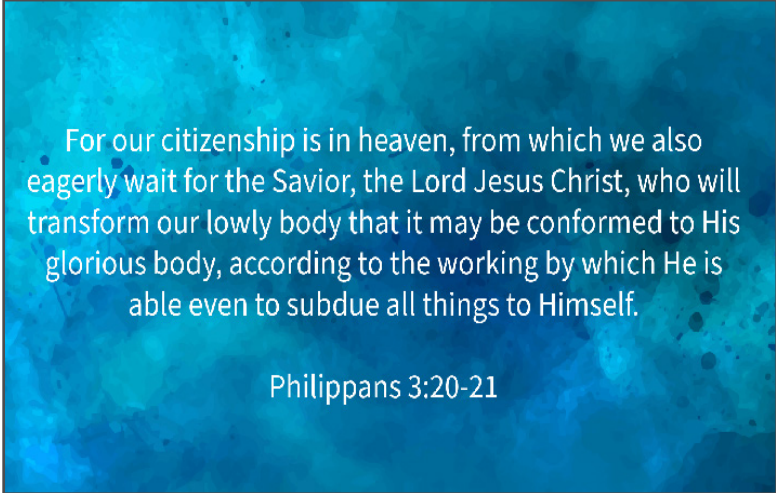
On the contrary, he wants the Corinthians to understand the difference between the physical body and the resurrected body through these examples. In fact, he lists three key distinctions between them over the next three verses. First, God will reverse the curse of sin and stop the decay of our current bodies. Despite our soul being eternal, our bodies break down over time because of the curse to which we have all subjected ourselves when we sin (Gen 3:19). Currently, our physical **body is sown in corruption** or decay, but at **the resurrection from the dead** our **body** will be **raised in**

incorruption or immortality never to die again; thus, there will be no more death or disease in heaven (v. 42).

Second, not only will God rid our new body of any physical ailment, but He will also rid it of sin itself. No longer will we have the propensity to sin, for God will transform our body **from dishonor to glory** (v. 43). In other words, our new, glorified body will be characterized by righteousness and obedience rather than sinfulness and disobedience. In heaven, therefore, there will be no death, disease, or depravity! Finally, our current physical body **is sown in weakness** whereas it will be **raised in power**. In this context, Paul probably intends this as an expansion of our sinless state in heaven. On earth, we don't have the fortitude to resist temptation on our own ([1 Cor 10:13](#)) and remain obedient to accomplish God's will because of the selfish inclinations of the flesh. But in heaven, we will have the **power** to resist and forever be effective in our service to the Lord.

Having cited these three distinctions, Paul concludes with a summary restating his point: we now have **a natural body** (physical or temporal) characterized by sin, but at **the resurrection of the dead** will receive our **spiritual body** (eternal) so we can live in perfect fellowship and

righteousness with the Lord forever. However, we can't achieve this on our own; Christ had to pave the way for us to have this type of life. For this reason, Paul continues his comparison of Christ to Adam that he began in verse 22 in order to heighten the difference between the two modes of existence. As a created being, **the first man, Adam, became** an animate, **living** person when God breathed the breath of life into his nostrils ([Gen 2:7](#)). Although he and his wife, Eve, were the progenitors of all mankind, their sin ultimately brought death into the world ([1 Cor 15:22](#)). For death, there was no cure. Humanity needed someone to conquer death and restore life for them. Only Christ could fulfill that purpose. With a play upon words from Genesis 2:7, therefore, Paul describes Christ as the last Adam who became a life-giving spirit. Christ conquered death and brought life to all who would receive it.



For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Philippians 3:20-21

1 Corinthians 15:46-49

THE FIRST MANS RESTORATION:

Paul now reminds them that **the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and the spiritual follows** (v. 46). The Corinthians had it backwards. They thought they had already inherited their **spiritual** bodies when they still lived in the **natural**. This has been a source of their problem from the beginning of this letter. They regarded themselves as wise and **spiritual**, but they still lived according to the flesh! Paul bluntly tells them they haven't made it yet. They're not perfect! To put it in John's terms, "It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we still see Him as He is" ([1 John 3:2](#)).

Question
8

In the natural or physical, with what temptations do you still currently struggle? How can we begin to overcome them even now in preparation for our future life with Christ?

To explain, Paul continues his comparison of the **first man** with the **last Man** (Christ). **The first man was made from the dust** of the ground, **but the second Man** was no created being; **He is the Lord from heaven** (v. 47). Just **as the first man was made from dust**, so **also are all those** of the successive generations who came after him (v. 48). But those who follow Christ, **the heavenly Man**, we should conform our **image** to His and follow the pattern He has set. So, Paul emphasizes that **as we have borne the image of the man of dust** (i.e., sinful and disobedient), so now **we** should **also bear the image of the heavenly Man** (righteous and obedient). While God has called us as believers to walk consistently with Him in righteousness while still in our **natural** or physical state of existence, one day He will complete the transformation in full allowing us to live permanently in righteousness through a glorified body patterned after His Son.

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

THE FINAL VICTORY OVER SIN AND DEATH:

Once again, Paul anticipates their objections to his argument. This time he addresses those who will ask, “Well, what about those who haven’t died when Christ returns? Will they retain their current bodies or miss the resurrection altogether since **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**” (v. 50). Although Paul doesn’t know exactly how God will accomplish this feat (i.e., **I tell you a mystery**), he is confident that it will happen. Even though not everyone will sleep (i.e., die), **we shall all be changed** (v. 51). At Christ’s second coming when **the trumpet** sounds, **in the twinkling of an eye** or a split-second, **the dead** in Christ **will be raised** and **we shall all be changed** (v. 52; see also [1 Thess 4:13-18](#)). We all must be changed from **corruptible** (decaying) to **incorruptible** (eternal) and from **mortal** to **immortality** (v. 53).

This thought should give us hope. As we look around at the world, however, we see chaos, destruction, and death. It never gets any better; it only grows worse every day. The world is in a constant state of turmoil and decay set in motion by sin. In this life, we have zero hope of things getting any better despite the change politicians or governments may promise us. But in the next life, we can have full confidence of our best life because our victory has already been won. We don’t have to live in defeat, depressed over our world. We can live in victory because of what Christ has accomplished through His crucifixion and resurrection, but also in what He has promised and will soon deliver when He returns. As the prophet Isaiah stated long ago and Paul quotes, “**Death is swallowed up in victory**” (v. 54; see [Isa 25:8](#)).

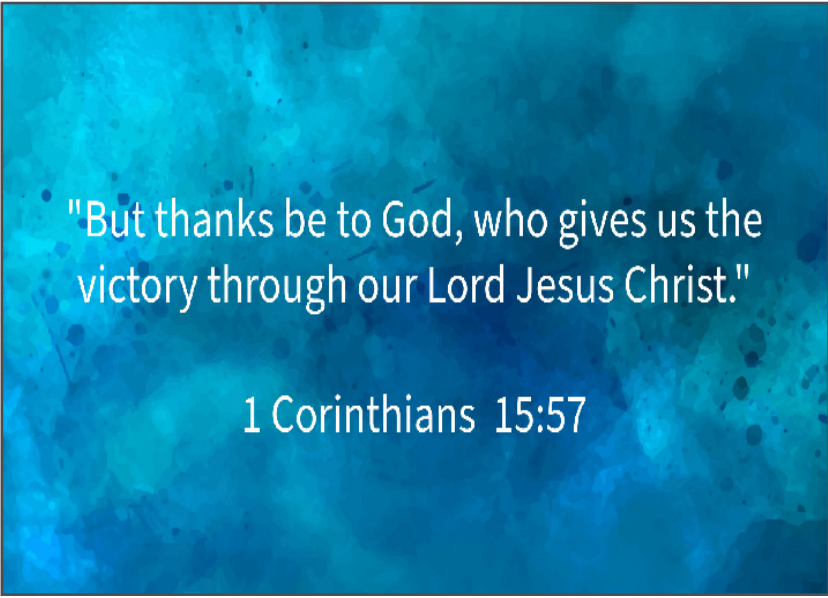
His death cemented our **victory**! His resurrection guarantees our fate! Through Christ, God has provided a way for us to be reconciled with Him. And through His resurrection, Christ has made it possible for us to be transformed from our sin-ridden bodies into a glorified body consistent with His righteousness. To reinforce this point, Paul appeals to Hosea 13:14: “**O death, where is your sting? O Hades (grave), where is your victory**” (v. 55)? None of us can overcome sin on our own. We cannot perfectly fulfill the law. We have all broken its commandments and stand condemned. In fact, James warns us, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” ([Jas 2:10](#)). Yet, in Christ, we have victory over sin and death. Death could not defeat our divine Lord and Savior and the grave gave Him up when God the

Father triumphantly called Him forth!

Therefore, Paul breaks into spontaneous praise and thanksgiving, grateful for God **who** has given **us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ** (v. 57). This should motivate us to live out our salvation now in righteousness, awaiting the time God will bring it to completion in Christ. We should look forward to that day with great anticipation, but we should not wait for that day to

start imitating Christ. The call has already started. We are already citizens of heaven so to speak, only temporarily living in a foreign land on earth. Consequently, we should act befitting of our citizenship and live in righteousness. As a result, Paul urges them to **be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that their labor is not in vain** (v. 58).

They are to remain **steadfast** and **immovable** on adhering to the gospel, God's Word, and not distort it to their own preferences or allow others to deceive them as to what it means. At the same time, they must also practice it. They must live it out. They must not let the temptations of the world sway them from living righteously in the service of Christ—such work is never empty or vain—but it always accomplishes that which God has purposed it to do. Therefore, as we conclude this lesson which is heavily theological with a practical bit of advice by asking ourselves: How are we living out our salvation right now? Do we immovably and steadfastly stand on the gospel or do we allow our preference and opinion to influence us? Or do we strive for righteousness and prefects, imitating our Savior who brought us victory over death?



"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Corinthians 15:57

Although we have just entered Spring and our lawns turned green and our trees blossomed just a few weeks ago, they will still go through their annual cycle once again as the seasons turn to Fall. Every year, the same process occurs; we can count on it. Only God could make it where the trees had leaves and bore fruit year-around. He would need to change their genetic make-up. In a similar way, our current bodies characterized by sin and decay need transformation. Even though we may have a relationship with Christ and have assurance of salvation, the state in which we currently live cannot inherit the kingdom of God. God needs to change us completely, giving us glorified bodies capable of living righteously without the prospect of sin. He needs to change our genetic make-up so to speak. God has called us to begin imitating His Son right now by living righteously in holiness. But we still live in our imperfect, human bodies. One day, however, God will give us our eternal glorified bodies so we can live forever with Him in perfect fellowship. As we await that transformation when Jesus returns, may we now stand steadfastly on the gospel without compromise—obediently practicing its principles in anticipation of that day as a testament that our citizenship resides in heaven!

Incorporate

How does the resurrection give you assurance and hope in your daily life? How do you share that hope with others in our world?

What struggles or conflicts have you encountered because of the gospel? How has God motivated you to continue in your service despite these struggles? How can you use them as a testimony, like Paul, to share your confidence in the reality of Christ and the power of His resurrection (see 1 Cor 15:30-34).

How does a future resurrected and glorified body with Christ give you pause to think about the way you live your current life in Christ right now?

Journal: Document God's Work

May 11, 2025



A New Mandate

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

Focal Verse:

"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"

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1 Corinthians 9:16

Introduce

This Sunday we will honor our mothers and recognize their many contributions which have enriched our lives and allowed us to flourish. Motivated by their love for us, they labored tirelessly to provide everything that we truly needed. This care often came at a great personal cost—causing them to make sacrifices that we will never even fully know. Rather than demanding their own “rights” or seeking what was owed to them, our mothers gave graciously of themselves—financially, materially, and socially. At times, they even sacrificed their own privacy. Our mothers often joyfully laid aside their own personal needs so that we could have the best life possible and grow in a healthy environment. Therefore, we ought to express heartfelt gratitude to the Lord for our mothers who loved and nurtured us in these ways often at their own expense.

As a mother, you may not ever pause to reflect on all the sacrifices you’ve made over the years. You simply do it because of your love for us and for the joy of watching us mature and succeed in life—which is a greater reward than mere money or possessions could ever offer. From the time you gave birth to us, you sacrificed your sleep—



constantly rising at all hours of the night to check on us as newborns. But it didn’t stop there. You often rose before sunrise to prepare our breakfast and get us ready for school. Long after we had gone to bed, you remained awake finishing laundry and ironing our clothes for the next day in a never-ending cycle. This came after an already long day of errands, housework, cooking dinner, and helping us with our homework. In households requiring a dual income, all this comes in addition to the job you faithfully worked.

You also made financial sacrifices regularly. Having children going through growth spurts, you would frequently delay buying new outfits for yourselves that you so desperately needed so you could keep us splendidly clothed. You often sacrificed your entertainment budget and money designated for other purposes in order to get us the birthday or Christmas present we really wanted that year. At meals, you gave us some of your portion to supplement ours—especially for ravenous adolescent teenage

Introduce

boys. While you needed rest, privacy, and social time with other adults for a healthy balance in life, you still sacrificed your time and privacy for our sakes. You always made yourselves available to us when we needed comfort, counsel, and correction. You were there to care for us when we were sick. You were there to encourage us when we were depressed. You were there to celebrate with us when we triumphed. You were there to counsel us when we needed advice. For just a moment, may we all stop to think of all sacrifices our mothers made for us and give thanks to the Lord. And, if possible, let our mothers know our gratitude for all that she has done for us.

This kind of sacrificial love isn't just a trait of motherhood; it should also characterize our motivation in Christian service and ministry as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 9:1-18. Rather than demand our personal "rights" or appeal to our "freedom" in Christ, we must do what best allows the spread of the gospel. Therefore, we shouldn't follow the pattern of this world which selfishly seeks what most benefits them; on the contrary, God has given us a new mandate to follow. When it comes to sharing the gospel effectively, we must sometimes voluntarily set aside what we may deem our personal "rights" or "freedoms" if they hinder its communication. In other words, we must often make sacrifices to share the gospel. In the end, God will reward us—often not with money or recognition—but with the joy of seeing the gospel effectively transform people's lives. Paul can testify to these things personally through his own ministry, so let us follow this new mandate God has given us and share the gospel without encumbrance to everyone we meet.

Key
Question

In what ways have you sacrificed in order to share the gospel?

1 Corinthians 9:1-7

SUBMIT RATHER THAN RESIST

To understand Paul's argument correctly in this chapter, we must remind ourselves of the letter's immediate context and its historical setting. Introduced by the phrase "now concerning," Paul has begun answering some of the Corinthians' questions which they had written to him in a letter. In a third question presented here in 1 Corinthians 8:1, they asked about whether they could eat meat sacrificed to idols. In elaborate rituals involving a feast on temple grounds, the pagans would offer sacrifices to their gods. They would burn the inedible portion of the animal sacrifice and consume the other. Although they ate much of the meat in the temple, a substantial amount also made its way into the marketplace where it was sold for private consumption in the home. Thus, the Corinthians' question was two-fold: 1) can we eat meat from the marketplace sacrificed to idols in the privacy of our own homes ([1 Cor 8:1-13](#); [10:23-11:1](#)) and 2) can we eat the meat while attending the fellowship meal in the temple itself ([1 Cor 10:1-22](#))?

The Corinthians reasoned that they had the right to eat such meat because the idols were inanimate objects; the supposed gods they represented didn't exist at all. While correct in their theological understanding, they failed to consider the harm it could cause weaker believers who may potentially abandon their Christian faith and return to their pagan roots. Therefore, Paul encouraged them not to engage in any practice that would cause a fellow believer to stumble and sin ([1 Cor 8:9-13](#)). If it meant refraining from buying the meat from the marketplace or serving it in their home, they should give up their right in order to protect their brother or sister with a weaker conscience. At the same time, however, they should never attend the pagan feasts at the temple because of the impression it gives in rendering service unto that deity. They should not create any confusion about whom they serve—the Lord alone. Within this setting, we find Paul's comments in chapter 9 on abdicating our "rights" and "freedoms" for the sake of the gospel ministry.



Paul introduces his argument through a series of rhetorical questions designed to defend his apostolic authority and to highlight his example as one who has given up his personal rights and freedoms for the sake of the gospel. Technically, the line of questioning begins with “**am I not free**” which the NKJV places second in this list (v. 1). This specific question serves as a link to Paul’s previous warning not to use their “liberty” or freedom for self-serving purposes at the expense of other believers causing them to stumble and sin ([1 Cor 8:9](#)); thus, it provides a seamless transition into his current argument in this chapter which focuses on laying aside anything that could hinder the spread of the gospel. Based on the Greek sentence structure, each of the questions in this list prompts the audience to reply with the answer, “Yes.” Paul wants them to clearly understand that he has the right to claim these privileges, but he has voluntarily laid them all aside for the sake of the surpassing value of the gospel.

Question
1

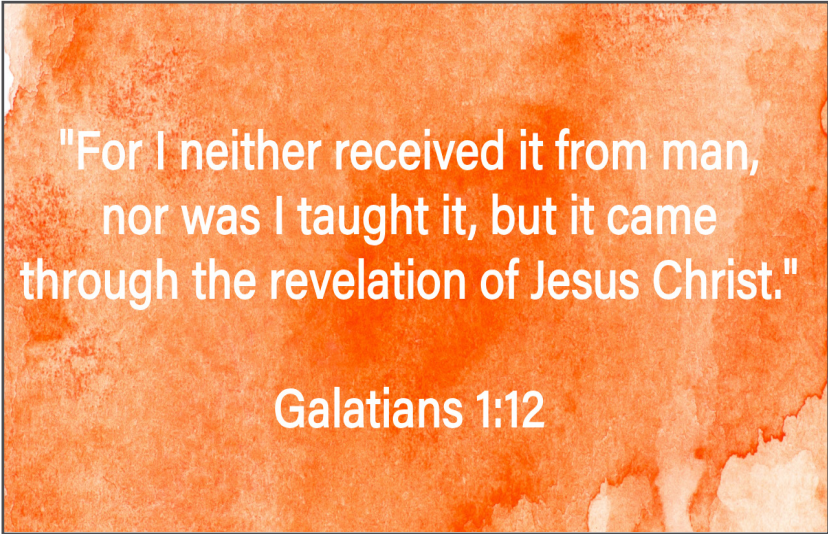
What things have you had to lay aside so you could more effectively share the gospel?

The second question, **am I not an apostle**, confirms both his God-given authority and commission to communicate the gospel. His authority wasn’t self-earned through the study of human philosophy or religion, but it came directly from God Himself ([Gal 1:11-12](#)). Some in the Corinthian church had begun to challenge Paul’s authority thereby also calling into question the validity and veracity (truthfulness) of the gospel which he preached (see [1 Cor 1:12](#); [4:1-5](#), [8-13](#); [5:1-2](#); [2 Corinthians 10-13](#)). Apparently, some doubted the legitimacy of Paul’s ministry because he served bi-vocationally as a tentmaker ([Acts 18:1-4](#)) and did not seek a salary among them (see also [2 Cor 11:7](#)). At that time, itinerate educators and philosophers would charge their students for their services or latch onto a well-funded, wealthy patron who would finance them—also providing them with both room and board. Only in rare cases would some work bi-vocationally to support themselves if, especially in the case of Paul, they didn’t want any outside influence over the message they presented. In any case, the Corinthians looked down on Paul even though they owed their salvation in Christ to his ministry.

The next two questions in the series seek to reaffirm Paul’s qualifications for regarding himself as **an apostle**. In the first he asks, “**Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?**” Through this allusion to his experience on the road to Damascus, Paul

describes his encounter with the risen Christ as an actual, bodily appearance, not some ecstatic “vision” (see also [1 Cor 15:8-9](#)). This is important because Acts 1:22 lists seeing the resurrected Christ along with having sat under his teaching as the two primary prerequisites for holding the office of apostle. Paul still fulfilled both requirements even though somewhat later than the other apostles who had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry. Namely, Jesus appeared to Paul in bodily form on the road to Damascus ([Acts 9:1-9](#)) and in due time He also revealed the gospel message directly unto him—for Paul acknowledged that he received the gospel from no other man, except from Christ alone ([Gal 1:11-17](#)).

In the second question, Paul asks, “**Are you not my work in the Lord**”—a reminder that they serve as the evidence or fruit of his ministry. He further points out that by questioning his apostleship they are indirectly casting doubt on their own faith. If they doubt his calling and question the truthfulness of his message, then they must also



"For I neither received it from man,
nor was I taught it, but it came
through the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Galatians 1:12

re-evaluate their own relationship with the Lord since their belief is rooted in the very message that he preached. Even **if others**—whether outside the community or inside agitators—did not recognize him **an apostle**, the Corinthian church as a whole should certainly affirm his **apostleship** because they were **the seal of his ministry in the Lord** (v. 2).

In this context, **seal** indicates a mark or stamp of authenticity—something that verifies a product as genuine. For example, automakers like General Motors label their parts with phrases like “Genuine GM Parts” to distinguish them from inferior knock-offs. In a similar way, Paul identifies the Corinthians as “genuine” proof of his apostolic ministry **in the Lord**. When a gospel ministry is centered on Christ, it will produce real transformation within people as they repent and surrender their lives to Him. This authentic transformation becomes evident not merely in numbers, but in their changed lives which now conform to Christ rather than the world ([1 Thess 1:9-10](#)).

Outward appearances, however, can sometimes be deceiving because people

can look vibrant and alive, bustling with activity, but they are in actuality dead ([Rev 3:1-6](#)). Churches may also seem appealing and popular so as to attract people giving the appearance of growth, but they fail to stand the test of time. The true test of ministry always involves verifiable, lasting life-change. We cannot stay where we are and follow Christ. We must allow Him to work within us to transform us. Before the Corinthians point fingers and call names, Paul wants them to re-evaluate their own relationship with the Lord. If they have truly experienced transformation through the gospel, then it came as a result of his ministry through the message he preached which then serves to demonstrate the authenticity of his own calling as **an apostle**. Therefore, both his calling as an apostle and their salvation **in the Lord** are delicately intertwined.

Moreover, Paul employs this series of four questions as a segue into his main **defense** by way of establishing his right as **an apostle** to exercise his authority to make certain demands or to receive certain perks due to his position. However, he deliberately chooses not to exercise his apostolic authority in this manner. Before he acts, he considers the impact that his actions as **an apostle** and servant of Christ will have on others. Anything that would harm his ability to preach the gospel, rather than enhance it, he willingly gives up. He doesn't want people focused on his personality, position, or privileges; he wants them focused on the gospel which points them to salvation in Christ.

To help us understand this principle, consider the following scenario: suppose a pastor or other full-time staff member purchased and drove a Bugatti—a luxury car brand with an average price tag between two to four million dollars. In such a case, the car would undoubtedly draw more attention



than the gospel. Does the pastor or staff have the right to own such an expensive car? In short, yes he does. Just like the average church member, the pastoral staff has the right to do whatever he wishes with the income he receives—assuming that he has prayed and sought God's will on the matter. Yet, just because we can do something doesn't always mean that we should. It may not always be the most prudent choice.

The more important question is not whether we have the freedom to do something, but whether the decision that we aim to make will enhance or distract from the ministry of the gospel.

At a Sunday service, such an expensive car would undoubtedly draw more attention than the gospel message. Some would criticize the staff member for buying it, complaining that the church overpays him. Others, however, would stand in awe of the car, wanting to take a ride or have the privilege of driving it. Either way, it has become a distraction. For this reason, most staff members would voluntarily choose to drive a more sensible car. Like Paul, we must be mindful of how our actions can hinder the presentation of the gospel or enhance it. Just as with the issue of meat sacrificed to idols, we must prioritize what is best for others in terms of our ability to present the gospel without distraction; we should never demand our rights or claim our freedom simply because we can. At the same time, however, the church as a whole must not impoverish the staff or expect them to drive a jalopy. Rather the church should provide full-time staff with a living wage which will meet their family's basic needs—a theme to which Paul will now turn.

Question # 2

How would you react to the scenario described above? What does this say about your focus more than the pastor's freedom to choose?

After this rather pointed introduction, we have arrived at Paul's main **defense** against those who have taken issue with his position (v. 3). Once again, Paul challenges the Corinthians' flawed thinking through a series of rhetorical questions. Each of these questions serves to advance Paul's primary point that full-time vocational ministers have the right to receive a living wage. Thus, he begins by asking, "**Do we not have the right to eat and drink**" (v. 4)? Here, eating does not refer to the consumption of meat sacrificed to idols in the larger context of this section, but when paired with drinking it refers to the basic staples or necessities of life. In other words, doesn't a full-time vocational minister have the right to earn a living to provide food, shelter, and clothing for he and his family?

When teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus instructs them to ask for their "daily bread" ([Matt 6:11](#)) as acknowledgement that we must depend upon the Father for all our basic needs. "Daily bread," therefore, encompasses more than just food; it signifies

all the things we need to survive. While we must “work” to secure these things and not wait idly for them to come from heaven like manna, we must never forget the Lord provided them. Similarly, when Paul speaks of **the right to eat and drink**, he refers to these same basic needs provided by the Lord through the church to meet the minister’s most basic needs.

Through the second question, Paul likely advocates that full-time vocational ministers have the right to receive financial support sufficient to provide for their families: “**Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife** like the rest of the **apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas**” (v. 5)? The rest of the



apostles likely refers to the larger group than just the twelve disciples ([Acts 14:14](#); [Gal 1:19](#)) while **brothers of the Lord** refers to Jesus’ half-brothers—sons through Joseph and Mary—since God was technically His Father ([Matt 12:46](#); [Mark 3:32](#); [Luke 8:19-20](#); [John 7:3](#)). Although this assertion doesn’t necessarily imply that all these individuals were married, most of them probably had wives per the custom of the day. Paul cites these two groups as general examples of the church financially providing support for full-time ministers. For this reason, Paul likely named **Cephas** (Peter) specifically because it was well known that he was married ([Matt 8:14](#)). Consequently, Peter served as a concrete example of churches supporting the families of those in full-time vocational ministry.

In-Depth Information



The phrase believing wife comes from the Greek words sister and wife. In this case, it would refer to a wife who is a sister *in Christ*. This has fueled speculation that Paul was indeed widowed, having a wife who died while accompanying him on one of his missionary journeys. But we can only make assumptions based on this passage and not offer any historical proof. Moreover, to delve into such a discussion also distracts from Paul’s primary point.

Paul's third rhetorical question in this series sets the stage for the three analogies that follow in verse 7: "**Is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working**" (v. 6)? Like the other **apostles** and full-time ministers, Paul and Barnabas had every right to receive financial support from the church. Yet, Paul speaks with a hint of irony here to highlight that, despite having this **right**, they have chosen to support themselves through bi-vocational work. To reinforce his point about receiving fair wages, Paul appeals to three common occupations which rightly compensate their workers: a soldier, a farmer, and a shepherd (v. 7). First, Paul insinuates that no one **ever goes to war at his own expense**. The word **expense** refers to his rations (food), equipment, and a stipend—all provided by the army to ensure his well-being. Second, a vineyard worker also naturally expects to share in some of the **fruit** of the harvest. Finally, a shepherd who cares for **the flock** also expects to enjoy some of the yield from the animals—such as **milk**. Paul's point is clear: in every profession, workers receive fair compensation for their labor which allows them to meet their needs and support their families. How much more, then, should those who labor full-time in the church also be financially supported for their work?

Question # 3

What are some of the benefits of working bi-vocationally while serving in the church? What are some of the benefits of full-time service for the church?

Even though Paul himself chose not to receive regular financial support from the church—for he did receive monetary assistance at times (see [Phil 4:14-20](#))—he does make a brilliant case for the right of other full-time vocational ministers to receive a salary if they so choose (see also [1 Tim 5:17-18](#)). While Paul doesn't give a one-size-fits-all mandate here either demanding one work bi-vocationally or, on the other hand, that one work full-time vocationally in the church, each

"If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ."

1 Corinthians 9:12

minister and congregation must do what is best for the propagation of the gospel as led by the Lord. However, the new mandate Paul does give is this: we shouldn't demand our rights or exploit our personal freedoms; instead, we should voluntarily give up anything that may hinder the spread of the gospel.

Before moving onto the next section, let's examine some of the benefits and challenges of both bi-vocational ministry and full-time service in the church, particularly in relation to financial support. When the church staff is fairly compensated, they are free to focus entirely on their calling rather than having to concentrate on raising support for themselves and their families. For example, this frees them to proclaim the gospel, equip (disciple) the membership for the work of ministry, manage the affairs of the congregation, and meet the needs of individual members.

The way Southern Baptists partner for international missions serves as an excellent model. Through gifts to the Cooperative Program and special offerings like the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, the International Mission Board provides missionaries with a salary, housing, and expenditures. Instead of diverting time and energy to fundraising, they can now concentrate on building relationships within their target communities in order to communicate the gospel. The same principle applies to those full-time ministers who serve in the local church. When their financial needs are met, they can focus on building the church through the gospel rather than having to engage in secular work.

Even though bi-vocational ministers may face some challenges in juggling secular work, family, and ministry, it still has some advantages. Depending upon his job, a bi-vocational minister often has more opportunity to interact with unbelievers who desperately need to hear the gospel. Their presence in the workplace becomes a natural place to share the gospel. Through his secular job, they can be a vocal and visible example to those who don't have a relationship with Christ. This doesn't mean that the vocational minister can't have the same opportunities, but that he must be more intentional and strategic. He must make more of an effort to take the gospel outside the walls of the church.

Additionally, bi-vocational ministers—being largely self-funded and self-sufficient—are less susceptible to internal financial pressure from the membership of the church. Even though the church may supplement some of their income, they are not beholden to those who control the purse strings. In churches with full-time staff,

Instruct

there is always a potential danger for members to begin viewing pastors and staff as employees rather than spiritual leaders called by God. When this mindset takes hold, especially amongst those who give substantially, it can lead to a struggle for control. Members can begin regarding themselves as “bosses” rather than as servants. They may even begin making demands based upon their personal preferences or even threatening to withhold their tithes and offerings until they get their way in order to sway the direction



of the church in their favor. This corrupted mindset certainly constitutes sin, posing a legitimate danger in our consumeristic world for the church to follow business-like principles to make people “happy” rather than preach the undiluted truth of the gospel!

In some cases, this internal financial pressure can cause full-time staff to compromise in order to keep the offerings up and their salaries flowing. Rather than being led by the Spirit and stand with conviction on what God has specifically tasked them to do, the staff can remain silent on difficult issues or cater to personal preferences for fear of upsetting the apple cart and losing support. More importantly, God has called staff, whether full-time or bi-vocational, to guide the church, guard it against sin, and keep in focused on Him moving forward in sharing the gospel cohesively. But the work of ministry isn’t just done by the staff. We must rid ourselves of this wrongful mindset that has led to spiritual rot within the church and severely limited the spread of the gospel. God has called everyone who has a relationship with Him to serve through the church and take the gospel to the world (Eph 4:11-12). While ministers are first and foremost accountable to God for their actions (Jas 3:1) and then the church (1 Tim 5:19-25), they are not employees paid to do all the work! The church, both laity and ministers, must work together to do whatever it takes to advance the gospel!

Question # 4

In what ways do you see this mindset of regarding the staff as employees in churches today? How has that actually hindered the effectiveness of the gospel?

it against sin, and keep in focused on Him moving forward in sharing the gospel cohesively. But the work of ministry isn't just done by the staff. We must rid ourselves of this wrongful mindset that has led to spiritual rot within the church and severely limited the spread of the gospel. God has called everyone who has a relationship with Him to serve through the church and take the gospel to the world ([Eph 4:11-12](#)). While ministers are first and foremost accountable to God for their actions ([Jas 3:1](#)) and then the church ([1 Tim 5:19-25](#)), they are not employees paid to do all the work! The church, both laity and ministers, must work together to do whatever it takes to advance the gospel!

Question
5

Even if you do not like something or have a particular preference about something in the church, why is withholding tithes never an option? Whom are you actually robbing?

1 Corinthians 9:8-14

SOW SPIRITUAL THINGS

With yet another rhetorical question, Paul adds further support for his claim that full-time ministers have the right to fair financial compensation—this time from Scripture itself. Paul asks, “**Do I say these things as a mere man?** Doesn’t **the law also say the same** thing” (v. 8)? In other words, Paul makes clear that he’s not just giving his own personal opinion on the matter, but that God Himself established the principle in Scripture (i.e., the law). Therefore, he cites Deuteronomy 25:4 as proof: “**You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain**” (v. 9). As an ox turned the millstone to grind **the grain**, it was to remain unmuzzled so that it could eat any that spilled from the hopper and fell onto the threshing floor. In a sense, this became the ox’s payment for its work.

Paul is using this verse as analogy to show how God cared



Instruct

for the **ox** and made provision for its needs. If God is **concerned** this much about a mere animal, how much more would He be **concerned** for the provision for the servants He's called to full-time ministry? Through this analogy, Paul incorporates the Hebrew practice of interpretation designed to show how a lesser instance of a principle (**ox**) applies to a greater one (minister of the gospel). If God cared this much for an ox, he would certainly care much more for His servant, so Paul rightly applies the same principle to our situation: **he who plows should plow in hope** of reaping some of the harvest and **he who threshes, like an ox, should be a partaker of his hope** (v. 10). Here, the one **who plows** represents the laity while the one **who threshes** (i.e., the **ox**) the ministers laboring alongside the membership. As God blesses the membership of the church financially, they also ought to share with the leadership with whom God has tasked with shepherding and caring for them.

If the Corinthians had not yet gotten Paul's point, he now states it explicitly: **If** they as the missionaries **have sown spiritual things** on their behalf, **is it** too much **if** they **reap material** benefits from them as well (v. 11)? He further qualifies his point by arguing, "**If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more** entitled (v. 12a)? Facing many hardships and setbacks, Paul and his missionary team (i.e., **we**) labored tirelessly among them in Corinth to share the gospel (i.e., **spiritual things**) which in the end they readily accepted proved by their salvation. Thus, the Apostle argues that as laborers for the gospel they had a right to receive a wage for the work they had done there.

Even though Paul was the first to preach the gospel to them, however, **others** received the benefits that rightfully belonged to Paul and his team. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure of the identity of these **others**. Perhaps, they represented the group of charlatans or false teachers currently causing the turmoil in the church and challenging Paul's authority. Likely, however, Paul would have not been upset if Apollos ([1 Cor 3:6](#)) or fellow laborers who came after them



would have received some financial support—provided that those who came later correctly communicated the gospel— since his own refusal of support was voluntary.

Rather than taking the benefits rightly afforded them by God, Paul explains why they did not. He would rather endure inconvenience and hardships (i.e., **all things**) **lest** they **hinder** the progress of **the gospel** (v. 12b). To further cement his point, Paul once again appeals to scriptural precedent, but this time along with Jesus’ teaching as well. To establish the connection from the Old Testament, Paul poses two more questions: **Don’t you know that those who minister the holy things eat of the holy things in the temple and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings at the altar** (v. 13)? In the Old Testament, God made special provision for the Levites who served Israel in various capacities as priests. Because they did not inherit a portion of land like the other tribes, God allotted them a portion of the tithe collected from the produce of the land ([Deut 14:27-29](#); [Num 18:20-21](#)). He also allowed the priests to eat a portion of the sacrifices offered to Him in the temple ([Josh 13:14](#); [18:7](#)) as well as portions of the grain and other offerings since they had no land on which to farm or raise cattle ([Lev 6:16, 26-29](#); [7:6-10, 31-34](#)).

Paul offers additional affirmation for his stance concerning how God has made provision for ministers through the church by referencing Jesus’ instructions to His disciples when He sent them out on mission. Paul notes that **the Lord** (Jesus) **has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel** (v. 14). Early church commentators linked this rather cryptic phrase with either Matthew 10:10 or Luke 10:7 where Jesus says something similar to, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” In each, as Jesus sends His disciples on mission, He instructs them not to go from house to house but stay with the first one that would host them. In any case, the host would provide the teams with the basic staples—food and shelter—while they engaged in the mission on which the Lord had sent them.

Question
6

In what way do some “ministers” abuse God’s gracious provision for them today? What harm has this caused the church collectively?

Providing full-time ministers a salary and supplementing the pay of bi-vocational ministers allows them to focus on preaching, teaching, counseling, evangelizing, and equipping the church to serve in the secular community to advance the gospel.

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However, both the staff and congregation together should fulfill these **spiritual things** which Paul has mentioned as members of God's body and citizens of His kingdom. Our focus should never be upon material wealth, but always on advancing the gospel through verbal proclamation and righteous living. The axiom in which Jesus stated concerning the love of money applies to both minister and layperson: "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (i.e., wealth)" ([Matt 6:24](#)).

Instead, we should store up our "treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" ([Matt 6:19-20](#)). God has called us to invest in the eternal by ordering our lives by the gospel as well as proclaiming its message to the lost. Although a minister can effectively disciple a large congregation and motivate them to share the gospel, it takes us all working together to make an impact on the world. One minister can never reach as many people in as many places as we can together as God's people.

Question
7

What does Scripture define as the "role" of a pastor / full-time leader in the church?
What is your role based on what God has commanded in Scripture?

1 Corinthians 9:15-18

SHARING THE GOSPEL IS REWARDING:

Paul reiterates that he has strategically chosen not to ask for financial support from the Corinthians in any form (v. 15). He hasn't demanded any **of these things** in person nor has he asked for them in a letter. He goes so far as to say that he would rather **die than to have anyone make his boasting void**. If he is **compelled** by the prospect of money to **preach the gospel**, he has **nothing to boast of** because he did it out of **necessity** rather than a willing desire (v. 16). In other words, money has now become his motivation rather than the Lord. Moreover, Paul recognizes that receiving financial support from others usually comes with stipulations and restrictions which can in turn influence the way that he presents the gospel or even cause him to alter the message that he preaches in order to make it more popular and palatable! Paul doesn't want to take any chance of altering the gospel for the sake of personal financial gain or

profit. Thus, he posits that it would be better for him to **die** or endure hardships (see [1 Cor 4:11-13](#)) than to have human restrictions placed upon him.

To help us better understand this section of text, we must ask, “What does Paul mean by making his **boasting void**?”

Through the gospel, God produces life change; He alone gives the spiritual increase or growth in the church ([1 Cor 3:7](#))—not Paul, Apollos, or anyone else. Therefore, Paul’s boast is always in the Lord and what He has accomplished through His servants ([1 Cor 1:30-31](#)). Yet,

Paul fears that if he accepts payment for his service rendered, although he had the right to do so, some people could begin to attribute this spiritual “work” to him rather than the Lord. This would then shift the focus from what the Lord has done to what Paul himself is doing. However, the Apostle always wants the Lord to receive the notoriety and glory over himself. If money motivated him instead of willingly allowing God to work through him organically to spread the gospel, it could then also become a factor for him touting his own accomplishments to get a better “salary” like any other itinerate teacher of his day.

Furthermore, Paul explains that he will receive **a reward** if he preaches **willingly** on his own volition without coercion from anyone (v. 17). On the other hand, he becomes a steward against his **will** to those who paid him when he takes a salary. A steward was a “trusted” slave whom his master put in charge over all the affairs of the household. The slave, therefore, always acted on behalf of the master and answered to him alone. Here, in this verse, Paul equates the people who supported him financially as the “master” and himself as the steward to highlight the potential conflict of interest and all the problems such a financial relationship could cause.

Hence, receiving payment could potentially back Paul into a corner because the wealthy patrons and the church may attempt to coerce (i.e., **compel**) him to preach a certain way or cater his message to their theological tastes ([2 Tim 4:3-4](#)). For instance, think of government grants. Grants always come with stipulations. The government, for example, tells those using the grants what they can and cannot do with them. If an



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organization accepts the money, then it is obligated to follow whatever practices the government wants to regulate—including practices that can be outrightly sinful and unbiblical at times.

This principle, however, really applies to any career and any person who receives a salary. Whoever writes the checks generally controls what a person can and cannot do or even what they can and cannot say while on the clock; to receive our paycheck, we must abide by what management expects. Yet, the church doesn't function as a business or company in this same sense. Although

God given us safeguards within the congregation to deal with leadership when they err or sin ([1 Tim 5:19-25](#)), the Lord, not the congregation, controls the direction of the body through the leadership whom He has put into place. The church is not really a democracy in the sense we regard it politically in our country! It's a theocracy that relies solely on the Lord. Because Paul doesn't depend upon anyone for financial support, therefore, he can fearlessly preach the gospel without interference from others trying to manipulate his message or control his mission.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

2 Timothy 4:3-4

Question
8

Rather than preaching the unadulterated, undiluted truth of the gospel, in what ways have some begun to cater to the culture in the name of making a living?

Paul ends this section with a final rhetorical question: **What is then my reward** (v. 18)? If Paul doesn't receive any financial support from the Corinthians for his work amongst them, **what** then **is** his **reward**? **When** he preaches **the gospel**, he can **present** it freely **without charge**, **not** taking advantage of his right to financial support. Thus, Paul's **reward** is the ability to **preach the gospel** freely without any interference from others. In addition, by paying his own way, Paul is also free from any charge of misusing the funds or exploiting people for a profit. Therefore, he can exclusively focus on preaching the gospel truthfully and not have to worry about how

perceive him.

Money should never be our motivation for ministry. It should come from our love for the Lord and our desire to see kingdom growth whereby people turn from their sins and surrender their lives to Christ. Additionally, when people give their hearts to Christ, it should give us joy as they mature in their faith actively glorifying God in the church through their service. At the same time, however, there must be balance. Just as anyone who works a secular job expects a salary for their services, the church must provide a living wage for the staff whom God has called to full-time service in their community. God designed and instituted in that way from the beginning so that those whom He has called can concentrate on spreading the gospel and the effective administration of the church.

Above all, ministers must be free to preach the gospel truthfully and boldly without fear of offending. We have the burden or responsibility of communicating God's Word accurately without interference from the culture or congregation—the prospect of receiving a salary should never change that. Ministry requires long hours which most pastors and staff never document. It involves difficult conversations during times of grief or correction. It involves times of great sacrifice to family and friends when members face struggles with health or a death in the family. Ministry is not a forty-hour-a-week job with weekends off. It requires constant dedication and faithful service to the Lord as He brings opportunity to lead the congregation over which He has called us. Therefore, whether we are a full-time vocational minister or a layperson, may we not demand our rights, but voluntarily lay them aside for the sake of communicating the gospel and seeing kingdom growth.

Mothers provide a good example for what it means to be a minister of the gospel, giving of themselves sacrificially to provide for, protect, and help their families to mature. We are grateful to the Lord for such godly mothers who exemplified the selflessness of Christ. The communication of the gospel requires this same sacrificial mindset. God has indeed granted us certain rights and privileges in life, but we must be willing to do whatever it takes to communicate the gospel so God can grow His kingdom. While we should never compromise the truth of the gospel to make it more acceptable to culture, we should put aside anything else that may potentially hinder us from being able to present it. Therefore, let us apply this new mandate that God has given us, making sacrifices and doing whatever it takes to advance the gospel into a world that desperately needs to hear it.

Incorporate

What rights or privileges in life would you be willingly to give up or lay aside for the sake of communicating the gospel?

What are some of the intangible “rewards” that God gives us? What “reward” has God granted you when you have shared the gospel faithfully?

How motivated are you to share the gospel with those you meet? What motivates you the most? How often do you share the gospel with family, friends, acquaintances, or even strangers?

May 18, 2025



A New Mission

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

Focal Verse:

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all,
that I might win the more."

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1 Corinthians 9:19

Introduce

When we participate in a mission trip—whether internationally, nationally, or even locally—we dedicate ourselves fully to the task of sharing the gospel. It becomes our central focus for that specific period of time. To maximize our impact, we try to eliminate distractions and mitigate cultural barriers that could potentially hinder us from reaching people with the gospel. Even when plans change—and they frequently do on the mission field—we remain flexible, committed to finding a way to communicate the gospel regardless of the circumstances. Because we're intentional in our effort, we look for any opportunity to evangelize and seize it. Therefore, many believers frequently return with powerful reports of lives changed in Christ—eagerly anticipating joining other trips in the future. But this raises an important question for us to consider this week: Do we experience this same passion and urgency for missions and evangelism in our daily lives and through the local church where we regularly serve? If not, why don't we?

While a few believers may make sharing the gospel part of their daily routine with the people with whom they interact, most unfortunately do not. Even many of those who go on a mission trip become distracted when they return home. No longer do they act with intention or a sense of urgency. After a few days back at



home, many return to their daily routines—becoming rigid rather than flexible. They fill their calendars with many worthwhile activities and events, including church-related ones, but sharing the gospel isn't one of them. Because they no longer make it a priority, they do not actively seek the occasion to witness neither do they recognize the opportunities that God grants them either.

God has called us not simply to “go on mission,” but to “be on mission”—a continuous state in which we consciously engage in evangelism every day. To be on mission must involve a state of willingness and readiness on our part to communicate the gospel with all people in any situation which we may find ourselves and at whatever cost it may come to us personally. It requires discipline, dedication, and

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sacrifice. It's not something that comes naturally or easily for most of us, however; we must work at it diligently. After all, God has commanded that every one of us who has a relationship with Him to share the gospel as we go about our daily business as part of our routine ([Matt 28:19-20](#)). He hasn't made this endeavor optional for some believers and not others! We all share in this responsibility together as God's people.

As believers, therefore, we should have a deep desire to reach not only "the nations" for Christ, but also our family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and acquaintances. While we often hear about large numbers of people coming to Christ in certain mission fields, the gospel's impact can take much longer to manifest in other regions—including right here in the United States. Yet, God has called us to take the gospel to both with equal vigor. Still, people are drawn to places where they see quick or visible "success" because it offers them a sense of accomplishment in having participated. But faithfulness to God's mission is not measured exclusively by numbers; it's measured by one's obedience to go and to do whatever is necessary to propagate the gospel to the lost.

Above all, God has called us to "be on mission" wherever we are in that moment. Consequently, we must guard against distractions and eliminate anything that hinders us from effectively sharing the gospel with a world that desperately needs to hear it. Like Paul, we must make ourselves available to the Lord and give maximum effort every day in proclaiming the gospel to the world around us. For the Apostle declares that he has "made [himself] a servant to all that [he] might win the more" (1 Cor 9:19). May we faithfully practice this new mission God has given us in Christ daily wherever we may be, with whomever we may find company, and whatever we may be doing.

Key
Question

How would you evaluate your participation in missions / sharing the gospel on a daily basis wherever you are?

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

THE DELIVERY OF THE GOSPEL TO ALL PEOPLE:

Last week, we learned why Paul did not seek any financial support from churches like Corinth but instead insisted on working his trade as a tentmaker to support himself. In 1 Corinthians 9:12, he affirms, “Nevertheless we have not used this right [to receive financial support as a minister], but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.” Anything that had the potential to derail his ability to present the gospel he eliminated. He didn’t take any chances. Not only did Paul want to guard himself against false accusations that he had somehow exploited the Corinthians financially, but he also wanted to ensure that he would remain faithful to preach the true, unadulterated message of the gospel. Because he owed nothing to no one in terms of financial patronage, he and his team had the freedom to preach the gospel boldly and accurately without interference. Paul, therefore, was free to speak the Word of the Lord directly as he had received it from Christ, not enslaved to keeping people happy with a positive, feel-good message in order to receive a stipend or financial support.

This background thus serves as a bridge to our discussion this week. In addition to working bi-vocationally as a way to safeguard the integrity of the gospel, Paul also attempted to remove any cultural barrier that could potentially stand in the way of ministry. He explains that even **though** he is **free from all**, he has **made** himself **a servant to all**, so



that he **might win the more** (v. 19). Although he is **free** of obligation to any man or organization because he receives financial support from no one, he still voluntarily serves by declaring the life-changing gospel to **all** people. By making himself a **servant to all**, Paul follows the pattern established by Christ who came to be an example for how we should serve. In Mark 10:45, Jesus declares his purpose saying, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.” Elsewhere, we see Jesus described as emptying Himself of His rights and privileges in

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heaven to come to earth as a **Servant**. At no time, however, did Jesus exploit His divine prerogative as God—even though He had every right to exercise His divine authority—but rather He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death on the cross ([Phil 2:6-8](#)).

Perhaps, this more than any other thing inspired Paul to lay aside his own rights and dedicate himself to the preaching of the gospel regardless of what it cost him personally. If Jesus left His luxurious and peaceful abode in heaven to come to earth to die in the most excruciating way on the cross, how much more should it motivate us to become servants who communicate the gospel despite the risk. Rather than demand our rights or insist on having our personal preferences met, we should voluntarily lay all these things aside for the sake of the gospel. We must ask ourselves, “What is more important to us: investing in eternal matters and seeing people trust Christ or amassing wealth and getting our way here on earth when it comes to our personal preferences and pet peeves?” When it comes to eternity, none of these material or earthly things will matter because we can’t take them with us and most of them will be but a distant memory in the presence of the Lord. On the other hand, what will matter is the joy we will receive from worshipping Christ together with **all** those whom He allowed us to lead into a relationship with Him!

Question #1

How do you model Jesus’ and Paul’s attitude toward serving others in your daily life?

Paul has become a **servant to all** for the purpose of winning **more** people to Christ. Therefore, he does not allow anything whatsoever, including cultural customs and social practices, hinder the spread of the gospel. When ministering to a particular culture, for example, Paul abided by their cultural customs as long as they didn’t constitute something immoral or conflict with the message of the gospel. For this reason, Paul points out that **to the Jews** he **became as a Jew that** he **might win** them (v. 20). Perhaps, the most evident example of this is when Paul encouraged his young protégé Timothy—who had a Jewish mother and grandmother ([Acts 16:1](#); [2 Tim 1:5](#))—to be circumcised so it didn’t prove a distraction to **the Jews** ([Acts 16:3](#)). As long as circumcision was not tied to a means of salvation ([Gal 5:1-6](#)), the practice was harmless and potentially opened doors to allow discussion about Christ with some **Jews** that

may have otherwise been closed. On the other hand, Paul did not compel Titus—who had no Jewish lineage—to be circumcised ([Gal 2:3](#)). It had no value to his salvation nor would it open any doors to **the Jews**. It would have simply become legalism at its finest, distracting from the true message of the gospel.

Likewise, **to those under the law** Paul abided by its social practices so that he might **win** them. He probably lists this as a separate category from **the Jews** because this would also have included Gentile converts to Judaism—or God-fearers like Cornelius ([Acts 10:1-2](#))—who participated in the ceremonies and

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:45

customs specified by **the law** given to Moses on Mount Sinai. When in the presence of other Jews, Paul likely kept the ceremonial parts of **the law** dealing with customs and social order, such as the food laws ([Rom 14:7](#); [Gal 2:10-13](#); [Col 2:16](#)). He also undoubtedly observed the prescribed festivals in remembrance of what God had done for His people ([Col 2:16](#)). For example, Paul probably followed strict dietary guidelines when fellowshiping with Jews present so they would focus more on the promise of the gospel than the content of his plate. At the same time, however, this didn't prevent him from dining with Gentiles or cause him to break fellowship with them as Peter had done ([Gal 2:11-21](#)). This would be a detriment to the gospel and counterproductive since God had already shown that salvation in Christ is open to all people regardless of background and culture ([Acts 10:34-42](#)).

Question
2

What distinguishes something from legalism which we should reject and a cultural custom or social practice which we can overlook and even participate in order to share the gospel?

Next, Paul states that **to those who are without the law**—the Gentiles—he became like them to **win** them to Christ (v. 21). To prevent any misunderstanding, however, he carefully qualifies his statement. Paul did not become lawless or

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unrighteous, acting immorally. He didn't reject God's **law** as it relates to Christ, but rather he is arguing that national markers of Jewish identity (i.e., diet, circumcision, and the festivals) did not prevent him from ministering to the Gentiles. The "**law of Christ**" fulfills the Torah (law of the Old Testament), ushering in a new era open to **all** who will trust Him; it also establishes a higher standard of ethics governed and guided by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us ([Gal 5:22-23](#)). Although being in Christ is not so much about adhering to rules and regulations but about who we have become in Him and how we walk, we still must strive to walk in righteousness after the pattern set by our Savior. Scripture is clear on that we should think like, imitate, and conform our lives to Christ ([Rom 8:29](#); [1 Cor 11:1](#); [Eph 5:1-2](#); [Phil 2:5](#))!

Unfortunately, some Christians rip Paul's assertion in verse 21 out of context as a way to justify sin and make a case for participating in hedonistic pleasure. To borrow one of Paul's most adamant phrases, "May this never be!" Over the years, for instance, I've heard believers excuse themselves for watching movies or television shows filled with debauchery and innuendo as a means of "identifying" or "relating to" the world. They argue that we must subject ourselves to these mediums and participate in what is popular culturally so we can be relevant and reach people by having ways to connect with them—having "street cred." What redeeming qualities are there in watching something filled with graphic violence, crude language, and gratuitous sex, however? We must find a different way of relating to the world! Scripture tells us to think on righteous things from God ([Col 3:2](#); [Phil 4:8](#)) and not to fill our mind with corrupt thoughts ([Psalm 119:11](#); [Mark 7:21-23](#)). By continually subjecting ourselves to these corrupt things, no matter how strong we may believe our willpower to be it eventually begin to affect us negatively.

Furthermore, I've heard people try to justify using foul language or telling dirty jokes as another way of connecting with people to get their attention. They argue that the world must see "we're just like them" before they will respect us enough to listen. Scripture, however, strongly condemns such language and joking,



plainly telling us not to fill our mouths with unwholesome talk and crude language ([Eph 5:3-4](#); [Col 3:8](#)). In addition to these two examples, some believers also misapply this principle to a number of other activities, such as drinking alcohol, frequenting casinos, and so much more, that either constitute sin outrightly or give the appearance of impropriety. We should avoid these types of things at all costs because they actually hinder our witness rather than bolster it!

When Paul speaks about being **without the law**, he isn't advocating for engaging in the lawless or unrighteous behavior of the world! As believers, our lives should reflect a clear distinction from the world. If that difference is not evident, then our witness is weakened. When we pattern our lives so closely after the world in an effort to "reach" it, we risk blurring the line between transformation and conformity. An unbeliever will find it difficult to understand the impact Christ has made on our lives if there's no outward evidence of change. If our choices, attitudes, and lifestyle, mirror those of someone who doesn't know Christ, what reason would anyone have to seek a relationship with Him that we claim is life-changing? However, when our lives bear visible fruit and our conduct sets us apart, it opens the door to share the gospel not only to be seen in our lives but also heard from our lips. That contrast may be what ultimately inspires someone to consider the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. The difference in our lives, lived out in love and humility, can be the very thing that God uses to bring someone to Himself.

Question
3

What other ways do some try to relate to the world under the guise of the freedom Paul mentions here, but in actuality participate in sin thereby hindering the progress of the gospel?

While we should never participate or condone such unrighteous activity, the viewing preferences, cursing, drinking, sexual immorality, or any other sinful habit—even giving the appearance of impropriety—should never prevent us from witnessing to an unbeliever. They are lost and don't know any better. Although Paul has already implored the Corinthians not to "keep company" with believers who practice such sinful deeds, he made it clear that we should not isolate ourselves from the world either; we need to be a witness to them and point them to Christ ([1 Cor 5:9-13](#)). Yet, we should

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never relate to them on their level when it comes to practicing unrighteousness. Instead, we should find other areas of common interests that can help us connect with them and bridge that gap.

As Christians, we have countless opportunities to be a witness simply by engaging in everyday activities. We can join local sports leagues—such as baseball, football, and soccer—where unbelievers also gather. We can participate in clubs that reflect our personal interests, such as



photography, gardening, and book discussions. Senior centers, gyms, and fitness classes also offer natural settings to build relationships. Even the dreaded HOA meeting and social events sponsored by them, present us with the opportunity to connect with people in our neighborhood. At the very least, when appropriate, we can invite neighbors and acquaintances to share a meal with us. These opportunities exist beyond the ones we have at work, school, and in the marketplace—they're woven into the very fabric of our daily lives. By being present and intentional, we can let our faith shine in ordinary moments!

Question
4

In what activities are you (can you be) more involved where you can find more opportunities to share your faith with unbelievers?

To more effectively share our faith, we should apply the following four key principles. First, we must be intentional about seeking opportunities to engage with unbelievers. This means participating in activities and events where meaningful interactions can occur. But it shouldn't stop there; we must also be intentional about sharing the gospel verbally. Our actions, while important, are not enough to help people know how to attain salvation through Christ. We must present the gospel clearly and explicitly using Scripture. Second, we must go to where the people are. One of the most common excuses cited for the lack of evangelism in churches is: "I don't know any unbelievers. All my friends are Christian and go to church here." This should

prompt us to reflect honestly by asking: “Have I made an effort to go where I can meet unbelievers? Have I been intentional about seeking opportunities to share my faith?”

Many churches offer a wide range of activities and opportunities for fellowship—so many, in fact, that our time becomes completely filled, often leaving little room for evangelism and missions. Even though we may “intend” these events to serve as “outreach,” the reality is that most members don’t invite unbelievers, the ones they do invite decline the invitation, or they simply invite friends from other churches. As a result, these gatherings tend to function primarily as internal fellowship, serving the church rather than advancing the kingdom. While spiritual maturity and discipleship are an important part of kingdom growth, so also is the number of baptisms since each represents a soul rescued by God from destruction.

Question
5

How often do you bring an unbeliever (not someone who goes to another church) with you to a church-sponsored event?

Unfortunately, we often surround ourselves only with other believers and gravitate toward our closest friends. While regular worship, discipleship, and fellowship are integral parts of the church ([Acts 2:42](#)), they must be balanced with intentional outreach. After all, the biblical model is that we are to go to the lost and not wait for them to come to us! Sadly, the church often reverses this model, expecting people to come to us if we simply host enough events. But real kingdom growth comes when we step out of our comfort zones and take the gospel to the people who need to hear it most! Once someone truly encounters Jesus and begins a relationship with Him, the next natural step is coming to church to worship and be discipled.

Third, we cannot isolate and insulate ourselves completely from the world. Shutting ourselves off and hoping unbelievers will somehow find their way to Christ is both unrealistic and unbiblical. Scripture makes it clear,



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“There is none who seeks after God” ([Rom 3:11](#)). While we should take steps to guard against becoming corrupted by the world and following its pattern of sin, we are still called to live in the world with integrity, righteousness, and purpose. Part of that purpose is to take bold steps to develop friendly relationships with unbelievers where we can share the gospel naturally. Inviting someone to church is good, but it’s not good enough. God hasn’t merely called us to deliver invites to church; He has called us to be His witnesses ([Acts 1:8](#)). Every believer is entrusted with the message of the gospel and empowered to share it. At the very least, we should be able to tell others what God has done in our lives—specifically how Christ has changed us.

Fourth, we must never share the gospel with arrogance, condescension, or a spirit of condemnation—for judgment belongs to the Lord alone ([Matt 7:1-2](#); [Deut 32:35](#); [Isa 33:22](#); [Rom 12:19](#)). Our role is not to constantly berate someone for their sins, nor constantly highlight their failures ([Matt 7:3-5](#)). Instead, we are called to present the truth with grace and mercy, allowing the Holy Spirit to convict their hearts ([John 16:8-11](#)). As we cultivate relationships and let others see Christ’s righteousness reflected in our lives, we gain the credibility to speak more openly.

In time, with sensitivity to the Spirit’s prompting, we can explain why we choose to live differently and why we abstain from certain behaviors to pursue a life of holiness. These moments allow us to speak the truth in love ([Eph 4:15](#)), offering clarity from Scripture without condemnation ([John 3:17-21](#)). Eventually, therefore, to present the gospel faithfully will require honest conversation about sin and the reality of life apart from Christ. We should seize these opportunities God gives to point them to the truth in Scripture while at the same time sharing our own story of repentance and transformation. With humility and conviction, we must declare the hope of salvation through Christ alone.

Question
6

What is the difference between being judgmental /condemning and explaining the consequences of someone’s sin to them? In what ways do we need to exercise caution in this area?

Finally, Paul says **to the weak** he **became weak that** he **might win** them (v. 22). The term **weak** reconnects us with the discussion in the previous chapter about those

who are **weak** in conscience ([1 Cor 8:12](#)). If we recall from that lesson, the **weak** are the believers who risk relapsing into their former pagan lifestyle because other Christians are consuming meat sacrificed to idols around them. These individuals get caught up in the moment and begin participating in their former practices. Therefore, Paul concludes that he would refrain from doing anything—even if he had the freedom or right to do it—that could cause a brother to stumble and sin. Consequently, he reasoned that it would be better for him to give up his right than to cause someone else to sin. Although the term **weak** refers to unbelievers—not believers—in this context, Paul applies this same principle here to evangelism. If anything—whether a cultural custom or social practice—prevented him from sharing the gospel with an unbeliever, he would gladly give up his right so that he might have a chance at winning them to Christ! This dedication to the proclamation of the gospel ought to inspire us to do the same.

On the mission field, especially in foreign countries, we will often encounter cultural customs and practices that differ drastically from our own. We must be conscious of how they can affect the way others perceive us as well as how they can affect our ability to share the gospel with them. For the most part, these are not sinful actions, but simply different expressions of culture. For example, in rural Kenya, the way the mission team dressed mattered. Women were expected to wear dresses in order to relate to the other women there. Men should wear trousers (pants in British English has a completely different meaning). Teachers and pastors were expected to wear a shirt and tie. For our culture, while people may notice and comment on the way we dress, it doesn't matter as much for ministry. Rather than defiantly maintain our own cultural expression and demand that we can wear whatever we want, we should abide by their standard so it doesn't become a distraction detracting from the gospel.

"For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything."

1 Thessalonians 1:8

In addition, many foreign countries have much different food options from our own and, in the name of hospitality, homes in which we enter may offer us the very best of what they consider a delicacy. Some of these delicacies, however, are things

Instruct

that we would never eat and would “gross us out.” Yet, countries, like Kenya, consider it rude and offensive to refuse something offered in someone else’s home. No matter how much we may want to say “no thank you” according to our custom, we ought to gratefully eat whatever a host serves without complaint or criticism. Like Paul, we must lay aside our perceived freedom for the sake of the gospel. Instead of insisting on our rights, may we eliminate any cultural custom and social practice that may hinder the spread of the gospel!

Question
7

What are other cultural customs or social practices (even here in the US) of which we must be conscious that may distract from spreading the gospel?

To conclude this section, Paul generally summarizes his argument with one broad, sweeping statement: he has **become all things to all** people so **that by all means** he **might save some**. Since we’ve already well established that this statement means that we should lay aside any cultural custom or social practice that does not constitute sin which may hinder the spread of the gospel, I want to focus on one final aspect of Paul’s argument. Paul hopes to **save some** through the gospel! He recognizes that some—not all—will respond favorably to the gospel which means that many will reject it. We can’t allow that to discourage us. We can’t allow those who reject the gospel to cause us to quit and give up. We must persist. God ties our “success” to our obedience to His call to “go and make disciples”—not the number of people who respond favorably. Yet, we can’t be “successful” if we don’t “go.” We can’t be “successful” if we don’t attempt to share the gospel verbally along with a consistent witness in the way we live. Based on this definition of success, let us each ask ourselves, “How successful am I at sharing the gospel?”

"Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

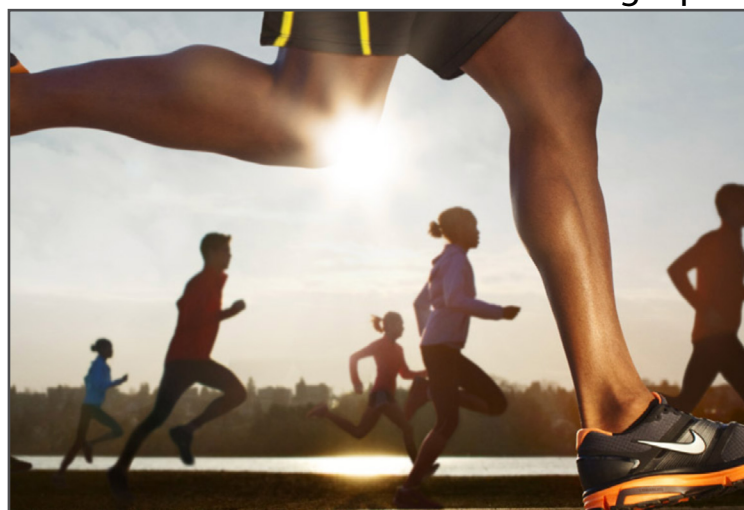
1 Corinthians 8:13

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

THE DISCIPLINE REQUIRED FOR THE MISSION:

A This final section bridges Paul's current emphasis on removing anything from our lives that may hinder the spread of the gospel and prepares the reader for his return to the topic of eating meat sacrificed to idols. To emphasize the discipline and dedication required for effective evangelism, Paul draws from two athletic metaphors familiar to his Corinthian audience: running and boxing—both prominent in the Isthmian games which were a precursor to the modern Olympics. He begins by posing a rhetorical question: **“Do you not know those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize** (v. 24)? With this, he challenges believers to **run in such a way that** they may **obtain the prize**. Yet, Paul's emphasis is not primarily on the prize itself, but on how the race is run. For this reason, he shifts the focus to the athlete's preparation, stating that **everyone who competes is** self-controlled (i.e., **temperate**) **in all things** (v. 25). Just as athletes train furiously to compete well, so too must believers practice spiritual discipline—exercising self-control in every area of life—in order to advance the gospel faithfully.

Running a **race** or marathon well requires discipline. It demands physical training, mental preparation, goal setting, and the intentional execution of strategy—specifically setting a pace throughout the competition to ensure endurance. In the same way, effective evangelism also calls for spiritual



discipline. Just as runners must maintain a strict diet and condition themselves through consistent training, such as weightlifting and cardio-vascular exercise, we too must cultivate spiritual habits that prepare us to share the gospel faithfully. Our diet should include constant prayer, the daily reading and memorization of Scripture, and the development of godly relationships that provide accountability and encouragement. While it is also valuable to study various evangelistic strategies and methods tailored to our culture, the most critical factor is our dependence on the Holy Spirit who empowers us and guides our conversations when presenting the gospel ([Matt 10:19-20](#)).

In addition to the training and preparation required before a **race**, how we conduct ourselves during the **race** is just as important. A skilled runner focuses intently on his own performance—he doesn't get distracted by watching others or comparing his pace to theirs. Doing so risks losing focus, stumbling, and even falling. Instead, he keeps his eyes fixed on the finish line, evaluating his own progress with the goal of finishing well. This is the mindset that Paul encourages when he says, "**Run in such a way as to obtain the prize.**" As believers, we are not called to measure ourselves against others, but to look to Christ—our perfect example—for how to live and run faithfully ([Heb 12:1-2](#)). Our focus should be on pursuing righteousness in Him, so that our conduct aligns with His Word. In doing so, we avoid becoming a stumbling block to others, thereby impeding the progress of the gospel through a hypocritical lifestyle.

To compete effectively in a race, we must first define our goal. Knowing what is expected of us and what we are aiming for helps us to adopt the right strategy or approach. For example, the approach to a marathon differs greatly from that of a hundred-yard dash. Each requires a distinct mindset and method. If a marathon runner were to sprint full speed from the start, the result would almost certainly be failure—fatigue would set in long before the finish line. Similarly, Paul defines our goal as obtaining **the prize**, but he doesn't stop there. He clarifies the nature of **the prize** that believers should pursue. Earthly athletes compete for **a perishable crown**—in the first century typically made of pine leaves covered in plaster. In contrast, believers compete for an **imperishable crown** (v. 25).

But what exactly is this **imperishable crown**? While many believers may associate it with eternal life or a literal **crown** given in heaven for faithful service, the context suggests something else. Paul uses this same language in Philippians 4:1, referring to believers in Philippi as "my joy and crown" whom he had the privilege of leading to Christ. Thus, in this context, the **imperishable crown** represents the eternal joy and fulfillment of seeing others come to faith in Christ through our witness. Outside of cultivating our personal



The wreath on the left represents the typical crown during Paul's era.

relationship with Christ and conforming ourselves to His image, leading others to Him is the primary goal of the Christian life! Yet, many believers live without a clear sense of this purpose. They drift through life simply trying to get from point A to point B, prioritizing many other things above this call to evangelism. If we have truly grasped Paul's message, we'll recognize that sharing the gospel—intentionally and sacrificially—should be our top priority.

Question
8

In a moment of honest reflection, where does sharing the gospel rank on your list of priorities?

To finish a race successfully, therefore, we must run with endurance and maintain a steady, consistent pace. While the ultimate goal is to cross the finish line, reaching that goal requires setting realistic goals and taking manageable steps along the way. Thinking about running all 26.2 miles of a marathon at once can feel overwhelming—perhaps even impossible. Yet, most marathons have checkpoints on average every two to three miles apart, giving runners physical and mental milestones to focus on one at a time. Sadly, many believers begin the race with enthusiasm, but over time they can grow weary and burn out—often because they haven't set realistic and attainable goals with the help of Christ. Although He has promised to equip us and empower us to be His witnesses, Jesus' command to take the gospel to the whole world can seem overwhelming, if not impossible for us to accomplish when we look at it holistically.

That's why it's helpful to create "spiritual checkpoints" or goals to measure our progress. Start by making a list of specific individuals in your life who need to hear the gospel, and commit to engage them one by one. In addition, consider joining a special interest group, local sports, league, or other activity in the community where you can be intentional about sharing your faith. By setting manageable, Spirit-led goals, we can remain faithful and effective in our witness—running the race with endurance step by step.



Instruct

Not only does running a race require self-control or discipline, but it also demands a clear strategy. We aren't meant to run aimlessly or without direction—we must run with purpose and intention just as Paul says, “**not with uncertainty**” (v. 26). Likewise, in boxing, a fighter doesn't simply flail his arms or swing wildly in **the air** like shadow boxing. Every movement—every bob and weave and strike—is calculate with the aim of landing a precise blow. There is intentionality behind every action. From this analogy, we can draw three core principles for evangelism. First, we must strike at a specific target: Be intentional in your witness; don't speak of the gospel in vague, general terms, but rather identify specific individuals by name who need to hear the good news and make a plan to reach them. Second, know your opponent: Understand what they believe and why. Learn about their worldview, background, and any barriers they may have to hearing the gospel. This will help you engage them thoughtfully and respectfully. Third, anticipate objections: As much as possible, prepare for the questions or challenges they may raise. Whie we can't foresee every response, and must always rely on the Holy Spirit, a well-prepared witness is often the most effective one.

Finally, Paul concludes by saying that he disciplines his **body** and brings **it into subjection**, so that, **when** he has preached **to others**, he himself might **not become disqualified** (v. 27). It is important to note that being **disqualified** here doesn't mean losing one's salvation. Rather, it speaks of the potential damage to one's credibility and witness—being seen as hypocritical in the eyes of others. In this context, disqualification means that one's actions contract his message, thereby weakening his testimony. Unfortunately, this is one of the most frequent criticisms unbelievers have toward believers: the charge of hypocrisy. They see people who claim to follow Christ, yet fail to reflect His character in their daily lives. When our conduct doesn't align with our confession, it causes confusion and undermines the gospel we claim to believe. God calls us to consistency—to lives that reflect His holiness and truth. By doing so, we represent Him faithfully and allow the power of the gospel to shine through both our words and actions.



This week, I want to challenge each of us to take a moment for honest, personal reflection: How are you doing at sharing the gospel each day? I'm not asking how you think "our church" is doing, but how you are doing your part to evangelize right here in this community. You are the church! Evangelism is both a corporate effort and individual responsibility. I'm not asking what you've done in the past or what you might do on future mission trips. But what are you doing right here and right now—in your neighborhood, workplace, school, or sphere of influence—to share the gospel? Let's be honest: we often spend far more time talking about past experiences or international missions than actually sharing the gospel right here in our own community. Inviting someone to church is good, but it's not good enough. Passing out invite cards on important days is good, but it's not good enough.

As God's people, evangelism should be a priority for every one of us! He has called each of us to make evangelism a daily priority. Thankfully, there are faithful members of our church who make evangelism part of their daily routines. But far too many don't, and some have never even once shared their faith! If we truly desire to see kingdom growth in and through our church, then everyone must take ownership of this God-given mission and do his part! We need to have a sense of intentionality as well as urgency, sharing our faith every day as God give us the opportunity. Will you join Him in His work and be faithful to do what He has command us?

Paul serves as an excellent role model for how we should evangelize our communities. His passion for Christ enabled him to endure hardships and make tough sacrifices for the sake of the gospel. In fact, anything in his life that might prove to be a hindrance for the gospel he eliminated. He didn't want anything to stand in the way of someone coming to faith in Christ and receiving the hope of eternal life. In Paul, we see the discipline and dedication needed for success. He made sharing the gospel the priority of his ministry and part of his daily routine as a bi-vocational tentmaker. Not a day went by that Paul didn't share the gospel with others! We in the twenty-first century church should have this same passion. It's not just the responsibility of the staff to share the gospel. It's not just the job of the laity to get people to church so they can hear the gospel. Our job collectively—but each one of us individually—is to take the gospel with us into the world and declare it unto everyone we meet. If we would do faithfully, God will bless His Word and people will come to know Him as their Savior. But it takes us going and telling the gospel with intentionality and purpose.

Incorporate

Prayerfully ask God to help you identify a list of specific people that you know who need to hear the gospel. Write their names here. If you have none, develop a list of special-interest groups, local sports teams, or places you can join or go in order to make connection with the lost and write them here.

Prayerfully ask God to help you develop a specific plan to reach these people. Briefly write that plan here.

Write your personal testimony here about how Christ saved you? In what specific ways have you seen God transform your life? You should be able to use this as a basis for sharing the gospel with others.

Journal: Document God's Work

May 25, 2025



A New Model

1 Corinthians 10:1-22

Focal Verse:

"Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted."

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1 Corinthians 10:6

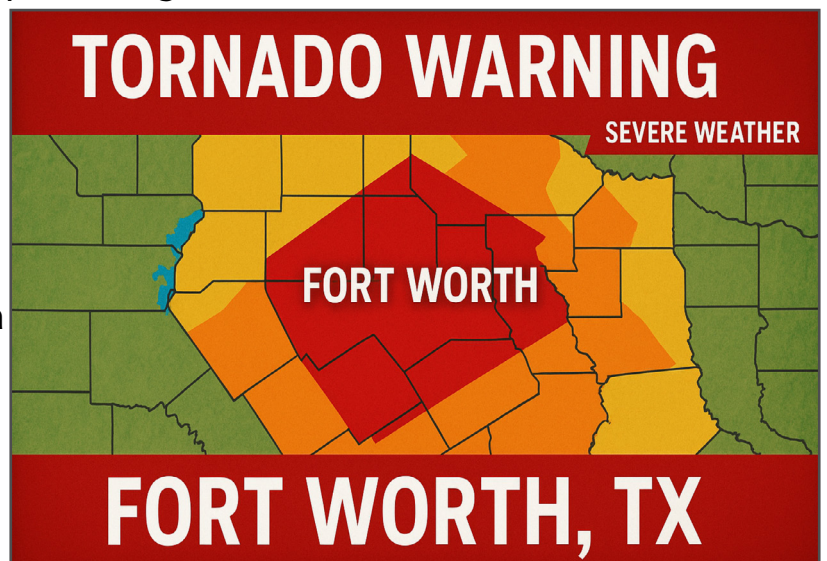
Introduce

Here, in North Texas, we have become all-too-familiar with tornado warnings—having several each year in the Spring and late Fall. In an attempt to alert us to possible danger, local officials will buzz our phones with push messages and often interrupt our favorite television or radio programs with urgent bulletins. In some ways, these warnings have become a matter of inconvenience rather than a source of information to some. On Fox Four News’ “Viewer’s Voice,” for example, a resident from Gun Barrel City always called every severe-weather season to voice his displeasure that they dared to preempt “Judge Judy” because they were covering a tornado warning elsewhere in DFW that didn’t affect him. Like clockwork, he called every time until a tornado struck his actual location; only then did he express his gratitude!

Fortunately, many of these warnings turn out to be false alarms; even though the supercell may have large hail and damaging straight-line wind, it produces no tornado. At other times, however, the warned area covers a much larger area than the actual tornado because we cannot precisely predict its actual movement, so meteorologists warn everyone in its potential path to take shelter. Unfortunately, this lack of precision coupled with the false warnings lead to inaction. Therefore, many people begin to tune out the warning, thinking that it doesn’t apply to them.

These warnings have become so familiar to us that people continue unfazed in whatever they were doing at the time. This is the reason why we see cars continuing to drive dangerously down the freeway or people continuing to cook dinner at home or stubbornly sitting on their couch watching television despite all the chaos happening outside around them. At night, some will hear the outdoor warning sirens and just roll over and try to go back to sleep. People only react, however, when they visibly see the vortex violently churning down their street, but then it’s essentially too late. While they may attempt to run to shelter, they still find themselves unprepared and caught dangerously in the middle of the storm.

In some ways, Scripture functions as God’s sign to Israel—and now us as His



Introduce

children united in Christ. The Bible constantly warns us against disobeying God and putting Him to the test. It explicitly warns us of the consequences of our sin by providing numerous examples of people who erred and were punished by the Lord, especially those wandering in the wilderness during the time of Moses. While Scripture does give us several examples of those who were faithful to the Lord, it contains just as many or more examples of those who were unfaithful and disobedient. Israel, and now we as the church, should pay careful attention to these “warnings” and the results of sinful behavior lest we fall into the same trap. But many people often find themselves desensitized—unaware—and so they commit the same egregious errors as those who have gone before us. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul cites much of Israel’s negative history as a warning to the church not to emulate their example but to adopt a new model of behavior through their imitation of Christ.

Key
Question

When have you ever ignored a “warning” sign? Generally, how did the situation turn out?

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

REMEMBER ISRAEL'S POOR CHOICES:

Last week, we concluded our lesson by examining Paul's use of two athletic metaphors to describe the discipline or self-control required to complete our God-given mission to evangelize the world through the proclamation of the gospel. Paul rigorously trained himself to endure hardships, act with intentionality, and eliminate anything in his life that may potentially hinder the progress of the gospel—remembering the prize is not something temporary which fades, but the everlasting joy of seeing people accept Christ as their Savior. Hence, Paul describes this training as disciplining his “body and bring[ing] it into subjection, lest, when [he has] preached to others, [he himself] should become disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27). To be “disqualified” doesn't mean that Paul will forfeit his salvation, but rather that he will damage and discredit his testimony—becoming an ineffective witness for Christ by not reflecting His holy character.

As chapter 10 begins, Paul continues this same line of reasoning in order to highlight the consequence of lacking self-control. Offering a word of caution and warning, he cites a litany of bad examples from Israel's past of those who failed to exercise self-control, thereby incurring God's wrath and judgment. He wants the



**I'M A
VERY GOOD
BAD
EXAMPLE**

Corinthian church to reflect on Israel's poor choices so they might not repeat the same mistakes. Because the Corinthians regarded themselves as “wise” and “knowledgeable,” Paul begins by challenging them **not to be unaware** or ignorant of Israel's history (v. 1). He asks them to consider: If they are so “wise” and “learned,” then why are they in danger of repeating Israel's same mistakes—especially when they can see the results recorded plainly in history? They need only look at the consequences of Israel's folly in the wilderness to see the eventual outcome of their own if they don't change course!

Even though the Israelites in the wilderness era had repeatedly witnessed first-hand how God worked miraculously to deliver them from Egypt and provide for

their needs, many in that generation still failed to exercise self-control and continually disobeyed the Lord. In the first three verses of chapter 10, Paul uses specific imagery from the exodus to remind the Corinthians of the many ways God graciously worked—and still works—on behalf of His people. For example, Paul points out how God *guided* Israel's every step through **the cloud** by day and the pillar of fire by night, leading them through the wilderness ([Exod 13:21-22](#)).

Moreover, the reference to passing **through the sea** clearly alludes to the parting of the Red Sea where God *delivered* the people once and for all from the pursuing Egyptian army. While Israel **passed** safely on dry ground, God caused the wall of water to collapse and engulf their pursuers, drowning Pharaoh and his entire army ([Exod 14:19-22](#)). Finally, Paul recalls how God *provided* for His people in the barren, arid wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula—noting that **they all ate the same spiritual food** (v. 3) and **drank the same spiritual drink** (v. 4). In this context, the adjective **spiritual** signifies God's miraculous or supernatural provision. Thus, food refers to the manna God sent from heaven ([Exod 16:4-30](#)) and **drink** to the water God brought forth from rocks ([Exod 17:1-7](#); [Num 20:2-13](#)).

Question
1

In what ways have you witnessed God's guidance, deliverance, and provision in your life personally? How does that motivate you to respond to Him?

Although the references to these biblical events are unmistakable, it becomes more difficult to discern what Paul means when he writes that **all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea** (v. 3) and that they **all drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them**, whom Paul identifies as **Christ** (v. 4). The repetition of the word **all** throughout this passage underscores that God's people collectively benefit from His provision. In other words, God freely offers these privileges to every member of the covenant community—Israel and now the church. In addition, Paul's reference to baptism highlights God's redemptive power at work. While baptism itself holds no "mystical" power to save, it does serve as visible, yet symbolic expression of belonging to God—participation in the deliverance He has provided ([Rom 6:3](#); [Gal 3:27](#)). In this way, Paul uses the concept of baptism figuratively to illustrate that every member of God's community can equally share in His blessings.

By doing this, Paul draws a powerful comparison: Just as God delivered Israel physically from enslavement in Egypt through Moses, He now delivers us spiritually from bondage to sin through **Christ**. The same God who led Israel through **the sea** and wilderness is the same God who leads the church today. And just as God expected His people then to demonstrate their identity in Him through obedient and righteous living, He



expects the same of His church today. Paul's warning is clear: If God did not spare the disobedient generation in the wilderness from His wrath, He will not overlook sin in the church either. Therefore, the church must not follow the pattern of rebellion and unbelief that led to Israel's downfall in the wilderness—or we risk experiencing the same judgment.

The spiritual Rock that followed the Israelites carried deep significance for Paul—not only as a symbol of deliverance and provision, but also as a poignant reminder of God's presence. When Paul describes **the Rock** as following them, He highlights God's continual care and protection. Wherever the people went, God was also there, faithfully providing for their needs. By identifying **Christ** as **the Rock**, Paul reminds the church of God's providing presence among us still today. Moreover, it also reminds us that it wasn't **Moses** who provided the **food** or water for the people—it was God Himself! Like the Israelites, the Corinthians had lost sight of the true source of their blessings. They came not from their wisdom or spiritual position, but from God! Jesus addressed a similar misunderstanding after the feeding of the 5000. When the mob pursued Him, focused only on physical sustenance, He tells them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven" ([John 6:32](#)). Jesus wanted them to realize that, as God, He was the Provider, but that He had much more to offer them than just physical food. He is the source of life for **all** who will trust Him ([John 6:27, 33](#)).

Despite all the blessings they had received, **most of them** greatly displeased God

by sinning—continually rebelling against Him. As a result, they incurred His wrath and judgment, **for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness** (v. 5). Those over eighteen in that generation, except Joshua and Caleb, failed to inherit the “prize” of the Promised Land ([Num 14:29-30](#)). By implication from 1 Corinthians 9:27, they were “disqualified” because of their sinful unbelief. Thus, the phrase translated **scattered** by the NKJV literally means “laid low,” and is taken from Numbers 14:16 and pictures the dead bodies of the Israelites scattered throughout the wilderness as a sign of God’s divine retribution for their disobedience. Therefore, this should serve as a “warning” sign to the Corinthians not to follow this same path!



1 Corinthians 10:6-11

REFUSE TO FOLLOW BAD EXAMPLES:

Paul emphasizes that the events in Israel’s history were meant to serve as **examples** for the Corinthians, warning them **not to lust after the same evil things** that Israel did (v. 6). This “**lust**” doesn’t just refer to sexual sin, but to sinful desires in general. Rather than longing for God and finding contentment in what He had provided, the Israelites desired physical and temporary pleasures—turning their hearts away from the Lord—very much also characteristic of Paul’s day and, sadly, now our own. Paul then outlines four specific sins that the Israelites had committed and, from the reports he’s heard, sins in which the Corinthians are now currently engaged themselves. His purpose in these illustrations is clear: He doesn’t want them to follow Israel’s folly and suffer the same fate!

First, Paul warns them against idolatry (v. 7). Citing Exodus 32:6, Paul refers to the time when the people engaged in idolatry before the golden calf. While Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, Aaron led the people to melt the gold they had plundered from Egypt to create an image of a calf. The people subsequently worshiped it by dancing, singing, shouting, feasting, and committing sexual immorality just like the pagans. The Corinthians, unfortunately, had begun doing

Instruct

the same thing. By attending celebrations in the pagan temples, some of them had rekindled their former relationships and returned to their roots, risking abandoning their faith altogether.

Question
2

In what ways do you see idolatry creeping into some of our churches today?

Second, Paul warns the Corinthians against committing **sexual immorality**, just as Israel **did** (v. 8). He references the 23,000 Israelites who died as a result of their sin ([Num 25:1-9](#)). In that account, the men of Israel engaged in **sexual immorality** with the women of Moab, who had invited them to a feast in honor of their god, Baal of Peor. Like many pagan fertility cults in the Ancient Near East, the worship of Baal involved ritualistic sexual acts meant to invoke fertility and prosperity from the gods. Startlingly, the Israelites not only joined in these immoral practices, but they also began worshiping the Moabite gods themselves—turning away from the Lord who had delivered them from Egypt. In response to their spiritual and moral betrayal, God sent a devastating plague or disease that killed 23,000 people.

Paul employs this example as a serious warning: the Corinthians must not fall into the same destructive pattern that Israel did—committing idolatry along with **sexual immorality**. As we saw in our study of 1 Corinthians 6:15-7:9, some believers in Corinth had returned to worship in pagan

"Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."

1 Corinthians 6:18

temples, engaging in sexual acts with prostitutes—something for which Corinth was well-known. In doing so, these believers severed their fellowship with the Lord and harmed the unity and purity of the church—a point which Paul will explain in more detail in the second half of this chapter. While most modern religions, cults, and sects may not promote ritualistic sexual encounters as part of worship, **sexual immorality** is still widespread in our culture today. Above all, this shows how God despises all forms of **sexual immorality** because it severs our relationship with Him and disrupts the

mission and witness of the church.

Third, Paul warns us **not** to **tempt Christ**, as **some** of the Israelites had done—and **were** consequently killed **by serpents** (v. 9). This most likely refers to Numbers 21:4-7 where the people complained that God and Moses had led them out of Egypt only to die in the wilderness. In this context, tempting Christ means putting Him to the test—challenging His authority and trying His patience by intentionally acting contrary to His will. In the wilderness, Israel tested God by constantly demanding He act according to their timeline and preferences, thereby calling into question His sovereignty and wisdom. Unfortunately, many believers today fall into this same pattern of testing Christ. In fact, some still test Him in three distinct ways. First, they abuse His grace by deliberately sinning with the assumption that forgiveness will always be granted ([Rom 6:1-14](#)). Second, they demand signs or proof—refusing to obey Christ until He provides further validation, even when His commands are already clear ([Deut 6:16](#); [Matt 4:7](#); [Matt 12:38-39](#)). Finally, they accuse Christ of not meeting their needs simply because He does not act according to their expectations or timing ([John 11:21, 32](#)).

Question
3

In what specific ways do we see people putting Christ to the test in our culture today?

Fourth, Paul warns against grumbling or complaining against the Lord (v. 10), a sin closely related to the testing of God mentioned in the previous verse. Throughout their time in the wilderness, the Israelites were marked by a spirit of complaint and rebellion, so it's difficult to pinpoint exactly which instance Paul had in mind here. He may be alluding to Numbers 14:1-38 where the people grumbled against God's chosen leadership—Moses—or possibly Numbers 16:14 where they protested God's judgment of Korah and his followers. In either case,

“Therefore you and all your company
are gathered together against the LORD. And
what is Aaron that you complain against him?”

Numbers 16:11

Israel refused to trust the Lord and the leadership He had placed over them, thereby directly rebelling against His authority. The Corinthians had done the same with Paul. By questioning his apostleship and challenging the content of his message, they were ultimately rebelling against the Lord Himself. Paul wasn't speaking a message about his own personal preferences, but rather he was communicating a message directly from the Lord Himself.

As a result of Israel challenging God's leadership, Paul notes that they were **destroyed by the destroyer** (v. 10). Some modern Bible translations render this as "killed by the destroying angel," but the Greek text literally says, "**destroyed by the destroyer**," with no mention of an "angel" or intermediary. Only God possess the ultimate authority over life and death, so it is most consistent with Scripture to understand **the destroyer** in this context as God Himself. This interpretation perfectly aligns with the Exodus account, which Paul has referenced throughout this section. Contrary to the misconception of an "angel of death," Exodus 12:29 explicitly states, "And it came to pass at midnight that *the Lord* struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh . . . and all the firstborn of livestock." Thus, the text attributes these deaths to the Lord, not an angel.

Moreover, God is the one who also sent all the plagues which ended in death upon Israel as well. This underscores the point that when God's authority is defied, He will personally execute His judgment. Like bookends, Paul closes this section just as he began by reminding the Corinthians that these **examples** from Israel's history should serve as **admonition** (v. 11). They must learn from Israel's bad **examples** and quickly turn from their wicked ways or risk facing God's judgment. While God patiently gives us time to repent, He will still execute His judgment swiftly and decisively one day according to His perfect timing.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13

RESIST TEMPTATION THROUGH GOD'S MEANS

Paul has written all these things so that the Corinthians may **not fall** in sin (v. 12). While he urges the whole church to pay attention to Israel's example, he especially wants those who think they are strong enough to resist **temptation** on their own to listen—**lest** they **fall**. The arrogant attitude of some in the Corinthian church had led them to believe that they were spiritually mature and, therefore, incapable of sinning. Because of this attitude, not only were they in danger of harming their witness in the community (i.e., being disqualified from the prize), but they were also in danger of facing God's judgment like Israel in the wilderness. After all, Scripture reminds us that "pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" ([Prov 16:18](#)). God expects us to surround ourselves with His wisdom which leads to life ([Prov 8:35](#)).

Question
4

In what ways can pride or overconfidence lead us to sin?

Verse 13 serves as a transition, connecting Paul's warning about pride with his command to flee idolatry. He reminds the Corinthians that their temptations are not unique; they are the same kind of struggles **common** to all people. On our own, we lack the strength to resist **temptation**—it's foolish to think otherwise. But God, **who is faithful**, empowers us to overcome and endure. When Paul says that God will **not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able**, it doesn't mean that He removes every difficult trial. On the contrary, this expression emphasizes our need to depend upon the Lord—not ourselves! For this reason, Paul points out that God Himself provides the **way of escape**—not always by completely eliminating the temptation, but by enabling us to endure it as we surrender ourselves to Him. In doing so, God takes on the weight of the challenge Himself, making victory possible through His

"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."

Hebrews 2:18

Instruct

strength—not ours!

We must not foolishly assume that we can withstand any **temptation**—whether great or small—by our own strength. Our ability to overcome comes only through relying on the Lord. After all, James doesn't just say, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you," but he first commands us to "submit to God" ([Jas 4:7](#)). True resistance to **temptation** starts with humble submission to God's authority and strength. Part of that submission is using the wisdom He has already given us which tells us to flee **temptation** or idolatry, not flirt with it. Just as the Israelites did in the wilderness when they joined themselves with the Moabites, we should never put God to the test by knowingly placing ourselves in situations where we are likely to fail, expecting Him to provide **a way** out after we willingly put ourselves into danger. None of us has the willpower to stand strong in these types of circumstances on our own. That's why Scripture repeatedly instructs us to flee sin—and it is to this command that Paul now turns in His discussion.

Question
5

Why is knowingly putting ourselves into a tempting situation actually testing God and a recipe for disaster on our part?

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

REMAIN PURE IN FELLOWSHIP:

Even though God gives us strength to overcome temptation, He also expects us to exercise wisdom in avoiding situations that would compromise our faith. That's why Paul commands the Corinthians to **flee from idolatry** (v. 14). Speaking with a hint of sarcasm, he says, "**I speak as to wise men**," addressing those who considered themselves spiritually discerning (v. 15). In reality, however, their behavior was anything but **wise**—they were failing to use the basic common sense that God had given them. If they were truly **wise**, they would be able to evaluate Paul's argument and recognize its truth. Rather than casually participating in the pagan rituals in the temple as if they were harmless, they should completely avoid them. Such involvement in these rituals wasn't neutral—it was destructive and undermined the fellowship and unity within the church in Christ. Therefore, Paul warns them not to partake in idolatrous practices and simultaneously try to serve Christ. The two are completely incompatible.

To help them understand the nature of the problem, Paul contrasts the Lord's Supper with pagan rituals in order to highlight their incompatibility and to show how the Corinthians' participation in such practices disrupted the unity of the church. Throughout this section, Paul emphasizes the concept of "fellowship," especially as it relates to the blessings and privileges we share in Christ. When referring to the elements of the Lord's Supper, Paul notes that **the cup of blessing which we bless**—that is **the cup** for which we give thanks—represents our union with Christ **through** His shed **blood** (v. 16). Likewise, the **bread** we **break** signifies **His body**, given for us. In other words, through Jesus' sacrificial death, we are brought into fellowship with God ([1 Cor 1:9](#); [1 John 1:3](#)).

Interestingly, Paul reverses the usual order—starting with **the cup** before **the bread**. This shift draws attention to the means of our relationship with God: the shedding of Jesus' **blood** ([Heb 9:22](#)). Furthermore, Paul makes a word play with the term **body**. While it certainly refers to Christ's physical **body** given for our sakes on the cross, he uses it as an analogy for the church—the body of believers—into which we are called. Therefore, by aligning themselves with pagan cults, the Corinthians' weren't just compromising their relationship with Christ; they were also severing their relationship with one another in the church. The result is both spiritually and relationally destructive!

Therefore, Paul explains that although **we are many**, we are all interconnected through Christ into **one body**—the church—united by His **blood** and His **body** sacrificially. In other words, we are bound together by our common worship and service to the

Lord. However, when believers join themselves to those outside the church opposed to God's will, they break that sacred bond in Christ. To illustrate his point, Paul appeals to Deuteronomy 14:22-27 where Israel is described as eating and fellowshiping in the presence of the Lord (v. 18). As the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, God instructed them to bring the first portion—the best part of their harvest—as an annual

"God is faithful, by whom you
were called into the fellowship
of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

1 Corinthians 1:9

Instruct

tithe to the temple. As part of this offering, they were to “eat before the Lord [their] God, in the place He chooses to make His name abide” ([Deut 14:23](#)). This act of eating in God’s presence was meant to teach them reverence and dependence upon Him. Hence, Paul asks, “Are those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” In the same way, Christians who share in the Lord’s Supper acknowledge their reverence for the Lord and their total dependence upon Him for their salvation; thus, to join with pagan cults is to betray this sacred fellowship with the Lord.

Question
6

In what ways do some Christians mix their worship of the Lord with other things? How does that damage their fellowship with Him?

Paul now clarifies his point by reminding them what he previously addressed in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. He reiterates that **idols**, in and of themselves, are worthless pieces of stone, metal, or other material—incapable of responding to the needs of their worshippers. Since the **idols** are worthless, the sacrifices **offered** to them are as equally powerless; they offer no true benefit or favor to those who present them (v. 19). At the same time, however, this doesn’t mean that participation in such rituals is harmless for believers. Paul warns that behind these empty ceremonies is real spiritual danger. These cultic practices are empowered by demonic forces (v. 20). The Gentiles aren’t consciously worshipping **demons**, but **rather** the god of this world has blinded their minds, using these idols to distract and deceive them, keeping them from the truth ([2 Cor 4:4](#)). When believers attend or take part in these rituals, they are not just engaging in meaningless tradition—but actually fellowshiping with **demons**. Such compromise distracts from their devotion to Christ and divides their loyalty.

Question
7

In what way does the enemy distract us in our worship and service of the Lord today?

Paul’s message is clear: we cannot participate in the Lord’s Supper and have fellowship with **demons** through these cultic forms of worship. Therefore, Paul adamantly states: “**You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake in the Lord’s table and the table of demons**” (v. 21). Such divided devotion is not only inconsistent—it is dangerous. Paul drives this point home with two

final rhetorical questions: **Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy** and **are we stronger than He** (v. 22)? The reference to God's jealousy draws from Exodus 20:5, where, in the giving of the Ten Commandments, God declares Himself to be a jealous God—not in the petty human sense, but as a uniquely holy God beyond compare who alone commands our worship. Therefore, we are to place no other gods before Him! He alone is worthy of our worship. Only He deserves the top priority in our lives. Moreover, this also connects directly to Jesus' teaching that we cannot serve two masters ([Matt 6:24](#)), and to James' teaching that we cannot be friends with the world while at the same time trying to serve Christ ([Jas 4:4](#)).

We cannot have divided loyalty and attempt to serve the Lord. It simply will not work!

Furthermore, to serve **idols**—whether literal or figurative, such as the idol of culture—while claiming to serve the Lord is **provoke** Him and test His patience by

"Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

James 4:4

disregarding His holiness. We cannot give our time, attention, and affection to the things of this world and expect to walk in true fellowship with the Lord. God calls for undivided devotion. If we don't take that seriously, it will inevitably lead us into sin. Paul's rhetorical question—"**Are we stronger than God**"—demands a resounding "no." We are not **strong** enough to resist temptation when we knowingly place ourselves in compromising situations. As Paul already warned in 1 Corinthians 10:9, Israel tested the Lord in the wilderness and were destroyed by serpents. We must not repeat their same mistakes! To deliberately flirt with temptation is like playing with fire. Instead, we need a new model to follow—not the pattern of rebellion seen in Israel's history, but the example of Christ Himself, who lived righteously, remained unstained by the world, and devoted Himself fully to the will of the Father. God has called us to walk this same pattern: one of holiness, humility, and complete devotion to Him.

Instruct

Every one of us probably has a different response when we are alerted to a tornado warning. Some of us may ignore it, others may take heed, but simply keep an eye out for the approaching storm, and others of us prepare immediately so as not to get caught off guard. Why should we take these—or any warning for that matter—seriously? We need to adequately prepare so we can act prudently when we find ourselves in danger. God has given us repeated warnings in Scripture, alerting us to spiritual danger in life. Therein, He's also recorded both good and bad examples which should help guide us. We're not to follow Israel's bad example in the wilderness in which they greatly displeased God because they divided their attention and were devoted to others things in life, thereby incurring His wrath. On the contrary, we are to abide by the new model that God has given us in Christ. We are to live righteously, devoting ourselves faithfully and completely to His service alone.

Incorporate:

Despite experiencing God's provision firsthand, why did Israel still rebel? Why do people still rebel today?

Paul's question "Are we stronger than He?" challenges self-reliance. Where in your life might you be depending on your own strength instead of submitting to God?

How can the church today grow in discernment, recognizing the spiritual dangers behind seemingly harmless cultural practices?

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