

Living Sacrifices

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. -Romans 12:1

If there were a top ten list of sermon scriptures, you can bet that Romans 12:1 would be on it—and for good reason. It is a profound picture of our highest calling and finest destiny. Of all the facets of the picture, let me focus in on one.

The Christians in Rome, both Jewish and Gentile, would have been familiar with the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Millions upon millions of animals—sheep, goats, and cattle—were sacrificed under the different covenants that God had with the Hebrew people. This system of sacrifice was a harbinger of the Lord Jesus himself who was sacrificed as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the entire world.

***You can't offer your
sacrifice and keep it too***

Now, I want to point out something about the nature of a sacrifice.

When something was presented to the Lord as a sacrifice, it was completely given over to him for the purpose for which God intended. Sometimes the offering was totally destroyed by fire (even by fire that came from heaven). Sometimes it was given over to the priests for their use. In any case, a sacrifice was something that was “given over.” You couldn’t give it to the priest and then say, “Excuse me, but when you are finished with that, I would like to have it back.” A sacrifice, by definition, is something that is relinquished. You either fully give it over or you keep it for yourself. You can’t offer your sacrifice and keep it too.

So when Paul says that we are to offer our *bodies as living sacrifices*, he is not talking about partial commitment. As the old joke goes, it is the pig, not the chicken, who is thoroughly committed to providing the bacon and egg breakfast. We think that we are doing well by laying a few eggs and giving them to the cause. But in the kind of sacrifice that Paul is describing, partial commitment is just not possible.

It is in view of God’s mercy that we need not fear offering our very bodies as living sacrifices. Not all sacrifices to the Lord have necessarily been pleasing in his eyes and nostrils, but like the Lord Jesus who offered up himself as a sacrifice, becoming the kind of living sacrifice that Paul describes is both holy and pleasing to God. And, such a sacrifice becomes your ultimate spiritual act of worship—and isn’t worship what we were created for?

No Authority Except That Which God Has Established

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. -Romans 13:1-2

All authority comes from God which means that all human authority is delegated authority. No one has or exercises any authority of their own. Any legitimate authority that anyone has comes because there is an ultimate authority that resides in heaven.

Many see Romans 13:1-2 as a difficult passage in the light of the many historical examples of unjust governments that can be named. Was the Third Reich established by God? Did the American patriots rebel against God when they established a revolution? Should the church support the immoral decisions of an ungodly parliament? If you understand Paul to be saying that every specific administration and regime has been handpicked and put into place by God, then a strong case can be made to answer these questions with the affirmative. But a proper understanding of delegated authority will help to resolve the uncertainties regarding this passage.

Every authority that exists, exists because God has sanctioned the necessity of governing authority

When Paul says, *“There is no authority except that which God has established,”* he is saying that every authority that exists, exists because God has sanctioned the necessity of governing authority. Anarchy is never an option. Because God has instituted societal (as well as familial and ecclesial) government, all governments that exist carry the warrant from God to exercise that authority. What they do with that authority and how they use it is really a different question. This principle can be understood by Jesus’ statement that *“the teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach”* (Mt 23:2-3). The key phrase here is *Moses’ seat*. Even though Jesus sternly rebuked the Pharisees and pronounced judgment on them, the office they carried still needed to be respected, and yes, submitted to. The “seat of Moses” was established by God as a governing authority and to rebel against what God had established was to rebel against God.

So, is there then ever cause for “civil disobedience?” Of course. There will be times when to disobey the governing authority is to obey the higher authority of the Lord. But we can still take an attitude of submission while we conscientiously disobey—all the while recognizing that to rebel against authority is to rebel against God.

The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. -1 Corinthians 15:47-49

Who do you look like? Is it your father or your grandfather? Your mother or your grandmother? How about an aunt or uncle or a sister or brother? Maybe you don’t look like anyone in your family. Maybe you were adopted. No matter. If you can’t immediately point to a genetic relative, you still, no doubt, can point to those from whom you have gained your sense of personhood. Perhaps you bear the likeness of your peers or the culture of which you are a product. The point is, you are bound to look like somebody. Who is that somebody?

Paul is dealing with the great theological truth that we will one day trade our natural bodies in for spiritual ones and be resurrected into the likeness and image of Jesus. Not that we will be turned into spiritual space clones with no defining characteristics of our own, but *just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven*. We are all human. We bear the likeness of our ancestors all the way back to that splendid moment when God formed the dust of the earth and breathed life into our first father. We are of the earth and are, as C.S. Lewis puts it, “Sons of Adam and daughters of Eve.” But that is just the first stage in our development. Those of us who have been born again carry within our mortal breast a new and immortal DNA—a heavenly deposit guaranteeing our transformation from the mortality of this world to the immortality of the next. And just as we have borne the likeness of the one who preceded us on the earth, we will bear the likeness of the one who comes from and precedes us to heaven.

We don’t have to wait until we go to heaven to start looking like him

But we don’t have to wait until we go to heaven to start looking like him. Paul tells the Corinthians in another letter that *we, who...all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory* (2 Co 3:18). We were predestined by God *to be conformed to the likeness of his Son* (Ro 8:29). Wayne Watson has put it this way in a song: “One day Jesus will call my name. As days go by, I hope I don’t stay the same. I want to get so close to him that there’s no big change—on that day when Jesus calls my name.”

Whose image and whose likeness do you bear?

If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. -1 Corinthians 15:14, 17-19

All of authentic Christianity rises or falls on the truth of the claim of one historical event—the resurrection of Christ. Did Jesus Christ, in fact, rise from the dead?

If He Did:

- He is who he claimed to be, the Son of the Living God.
- He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth including the authority to forgive sin.
- He is the only way of salvation and will be standard by which all whoever lived are judged on the great Day of Reckoning.
- Death no longer has mastery over humankind and those who hope in Jesus are assured that they too will be resurrected to eternal life.
- The power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in his followers and nothing is impossible for them. The Gospel is the power of salvation to all who would believe and the church is to bring that message with enthusiasm, creativity and power.

If He Did Not:

- The Gospel is a lie.
- The apostles and all the tens of thousands of Christians who have been martyred for their faith died for nothing. Their faith was futile.
- There is no forgiveness of sins and Christians are like the rest of humanity—lost and without hope in the world. No matter how many good teachings and good works may have come from sincere Christian people, these believers were and are deluded and every church should close its doors.
- The church has no reason to exist. If only for philanthropic purposes the church continues, they are a sorry lot. If they are following Christ in this life only, they are above all people to be pitied.
- What evidence do we have that there that there is a resurrection at all? We might as well live only for ourselves and party till we die.
- Our highest aim should be our own fulfillment whether it is from money, sex, power, prestige, friendship or family. We should accumulate, scintillate, fornicate, desecrate and then disintegrate.

Did Jesus Christ rise from the dead? It does matter.

1 Corinthians 15:33-58

July 31

The Likeness of the Man from Heaven

Disputable Matters

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything...The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. -Romans 14:1-3

It was the early nineties. We had just finished one of the more blessed services our church had ever experienced. We had washed each other's feet and shared the Lord's Supper together. Afterward, still basking in the glow of sweet fellowship, I was walking to my office. Two couples stopped me and said, "What are we going to do about the earring." I had no idea what they were talking about. They explained that during our service they had noticed that a man, one of our worship leaders, was wearing an earring—and that it was unacceptable. So they asked again, "What are we going to do about the earring." "We're not doing anything about the earring," was my reply. Unfortunately, the issue didn't die there. In a subsequent conversation with the concerned couples, they made the case that the man was not strong in the faith and when he matured, he would see that it was not right for a man to wear an earring. When I pointed out that according to Romans 14, they, not he, were the ones with the weak faith, they were none too pleased.

These are matters where there is latitude for divergent beliefs and practices in the Lord

This is a prime example of what Romans 14:1 terms a *disputable matter*. These are matters where there is latitude for divergent beliefs and practices in the Lord. Biblical wisdom says we should not pass judgment on these matters. The illustration that Paul uses is about what a person's conscience allows them to eat: *One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables*. Paul has astute counsel for each party on how they should approach one another: The one who has the freedom *must not look down* on the one who doesn't. Why? Because everyone must live according to their conscience and convictions as unto the Lord. The one who doesn't have the freedom *must not condemn* the one who does. Why? Because *God has accepted him* and it would not be right that those things he considers as good to be spoken of as evil (see v16).

Paul goes on to say, "*Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food*"—or an earring, if I may. The unity of the church is essential to kingdom work. So please, do not pass judgment on disputable matters.

Romans 14:13-15:4

July 4

Everything That Does Not Come from Faith Is Sin

Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. - Romans 14:22-23

Paul speaks of *disputable matters* (Ro 14:1) that rise up within the church, but sometimes persons have to deal with disputable matters that rise up within their own souls. These personal matters need to be handled from a position of faith and confidence—not from doubt and misgiving.

The teaching of Romans 14 has been very helpful to me in my ministry as a pastor. Frequently, I have people approach me and ask if something is right or wrong. Sometimes the inquiring person is looking for approval from a voice of authority regarding doing something that they know the Bible says is wrong, but they want to be able to justify doing it anyway. In such cases, I have to be forthright and contradict their will because there is really nothing disputable about the matter. But in other cases, I will have sincere persons approach me with a matter that is not clearly right or wrong of which they are truly unsure. Often, what is happening for them is that there is some proposed action that seems reasonable and permissible in their thinking, but something in their (possibly overactive) conscience says, “No.” So, if I perceive the proposed action to be permissible, beneficial and not exercising some kind of mastery over them (see 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23) I will tell them so. But then I will point them to Romans 14:22-23: *Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

A mentor in the faith, Curt Nielsen, used to say, “It’s wrong to violate your conscience, even if your conscience is wrong.” If you approve something that your conscience opposes, you will live under the condemnation of your conscience. You cannot do something in faith if your inner being believes it to be wrong; therefore, to do it is sin, even if it would not be sin to someone else.

We must have confidence in what we approve and what we do. The word “confidence” comes from the Latin, “con fideo”—“with faith.” If you can’t do something with the confidence that you know it is right—then don’t do it, because it would not be done in faith. And if it can’t be done in faith then the motive is to please self and not the Lord—and that is sin.

Romans 15:5-13

July 5

Accept One Another

If you can't do something with the confidence that you know it is right—then don't do it, because it would not be done in faith

I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. -1 Corinthians 15:9-10

Paul had a very healthy view of himself. What this means—and what it always means for anyone with an excellent self-image—is that he saw himself in accordance with the truth. On the one hand he saw himself as the chief of sinners (see 1 Timothy 1:15 KJV). He said, “*I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*” If you know anything about Paul’s story, you can understand why and how he saw himself this way. But it doesn’t end there because, on the other hand, he knew who he had become in Christ and the significance of his calling as an apostle. He accepted and embraced who he had become. He wasn’t self-effacing or falsely modest about who he was. He recognized it and said, “*By the grace of God I am what I am.*”

How can you be “the chief of sinners” and a great apostle at the same time? The truth is, no one could carry the kind of mantle that Paul had without the realization and recognition of their own unworthiness to do so. The other great apostle of the New Testament church, Peter, was akin to Paul in the way he viewed himself. He too could have easily said, “I am the least of the apostles and do not deserve to be called an apostle because I denied Christ. Nevertheless, I am what I am by the grace of God.”

You see, it is the grace of God that makes all the difference. Grace is not “God’s unmerited favor;” it is “God’s enabling power.” Grace is not some kind of stardust that God sprinkles from heaven that covers a few poor sinners; it is his power at work to change those sinners into people of greatness. That’s why Paul said, “*His grace to me was not without effect.*”

So, there are two components to a precise and healthy self-image. The first is the realization of the poverty of self-sufficiency and the second is the acceptance and the dependence on the operation of the grace of God. Popular psychology recognizes neither. That’s why I heard a television talk show host bemoan the line from “Amazing Grace” that says, “...that saved a wretch like me.” He thought it appalling that anyone would think of themselves as a “wretch.” What he doesn’t realize is that, first, it happens to be the truth and, second, it is the prerequisite for obtaining the grace of God to become who and what you were meant to be.

Paul’s self-image was rooted in the grace of God that was at work in his life. Where does your self-image come from?

1 Corinthians 15:12-32

July 30

If Christ Has Not Been Raised

There are two components to a precise and healthy self-image

When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.... -1 Corinthians 14:3

How did they “do church” in New Testament times? What things were normative for them and are examples of what we can and should be doing in our corporate gatherings? The following is a list of New Testament worship practices that we can emulate when we “come together.”

Singing: (1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; Mk 14:26) Singing psalms (songs of devotion), hymns (songs of doctrine) and spiritual songs (songs given by the Spirit during worship).

Testimony: (Acts 14:27; 21:19) Thankful reports of what God is doing in and through the believers.

Teaching: (Acts 2:42; 11:26; 20:20; 1 Cor. 14:26) Instruction from the word of God to lead people in the way of truth.

Admonishing/Encouraging: (Col 3:16; Acts 15:32; Rom 12:8; Heb 10:25) Giving a word of exhortation, warning, encouragement etc... that motivates the people of God to keep the faith.

Prophecy: (1 Cor 14; Acts 2:17; 1 Th 5:20) The speaking of a timely and specific message that God wants to convey to his people.

Tongues & Interpretation: (1 Cor; 14; 12:10; Acts 2:4) An inspired message spoken in a heavenly or foreign language that is interpreted for and understood by the church for their edification.

Prophetic Revelations: (1 Cor 14:26 & 30; 12:8; Acts 5:3) Visions, dreams, words of knowledge and words of wisdom given by God.

Prayer: (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:24; 12:5; 14:23; Eph 6:18; Col 4:2) Public prayer has always been a part of what happens when the church comes together. Included can be prayer ministry for individual needs resulting in healings, deliverance and miracles. (See James 5:14 and 1 Corinthians 12:9).

Reading of Scripture: (1 Tim 4:13; Acts 17:11) The Scripture needs to be read when the church comes together.

Preaching: (1 Tim 4:13; 5:17; Acts 6:4; 20:20) Proclaiming the gospel message of salvation in Jesus.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper: (Acts 2:41; Mt 28:19, Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:23-26). The early church observed these ordinances.

The Breaking of Bread: (Acts 2:42 & 46; 20:7) Eating together in true fellowship.

Giving: (1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:7 Acts 4:34-35) A regular practice of receiving monetary gifts.

May...God...give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. -Romans 15:5-7

For the ten years that I directed a one-week summer youth camp, I was always amazed—and grateful—how God invariably answered the prayers of the leaders that there would be a spirit of unity and acceptance at the camp. One year was especially gratifying and unforgettable.

Kenny was a junior high kid from the community who accepted my invitation to come to camp. He was severely rejected by the kids in the neighborhood who had a derogatory name for him that I will not repeat. The first evening at camp, Kenny made a friend and won a Frisbee that he carried with him the entire week as he and his new buddy did everything together. The last night of the camp, at our “Testimony and Talent” night, Ken signed up to do “Frisbee Tricks.” Everyone cheered as he came on stage. “For my first trick,” Kenny said to the hundred plus people in attendance, “I will spin the Frisbee on my finger,” which he capably did to the applause of the campers. When the applause subsided, he said, “And now for my final trick. I will throw the Frisbee in the air and catch it.” He failed on his first attempt. Encouraged by the campers to try again, he gave it another toss, but the Frisbee glanced off his hand and onto the floor. “C’mon Kenny, you can do it,” rang out all over the auditorium. As the Frisbee went in the air for a third time, I know there were no less than a hundred people praying that he would be able to catch it this time. As the Frisbee came down, he reached out his hand and snatched it out of the air. When he did, the place erupted and everyone jumped to their feet to give Kenny high fives as he triumphantly came down off the stage. The next day as I dropped Kenny off at home, his mother asked him, “How was camp?” He replied, “Mom, it was the best week of my life.”

“How was camp?”... “Mom, it was the best week of my life.”

Acceptance is so very powerful. And according to what Paul says here in Romans 15, it brings both unity and praise to God (see the above scripture). That is what we discovered at youth camp. Unity and acceptance fed one another and brought much praise to God. You can see how Satan would want to sow disunity and rejection—but don’t let it happen. If, with the help of God, the kids at youth camp can have a spirit of unity and glorify God with one heart and mouth, accepting each other as Jesus accepted them, then so can we.

I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. -Romans 15:17-19

The church will never accomplish its purpose without the power of signs and miracles. As long as we remain without signs and miracles we will be less than what God intends for us to be. Let me say it again. Without the power of signs and miracles we will not be the church that God has called us to be.

Paul was very clear. The reason that the Gentiles were led to obey God was because of the power of signs and miracles. Without signs and miracles, Christ would not have accomplished what he did through Paul. Peruse the book of Acts and you will find that in the majority of cases where people responded to the call of the Lord, that call was accompanied by signs, wonders and miracles. Paul's preaching was not *with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power* (1 Co 2:4).

Without the power of signs and miracles we will not be the church that God has called us to be

In speaking with a student from Princeton Seminary who was the national president of Students for Frontier Missions, I asked if the gospel was making inroads among the Muslims. He said, "Only were there are signs and wonders accompanying the gospel." Signs and miracles are meant to accompany the gospel. In the places of the world where the gospel is spreading rapidly, the power of signs and miracles is usually evident.

Some may wonder if conversions may be more spurious for those who believe because of a "sign" than for those who come to faith accepting the tenets of the gospel apart from any need for a sign. After all, it is an evil generation that seeks a sign and blessed is he who has not seen a sign and yet believes (see Luke 11:29 and John 20:29). Isn't faith stronger for a person who did not need a sign in the first place? My observation has been that, generally speaking, those who have experienced the miraculous in their conversion have fewer doubts down the road than those who have had no such experience. Paul said it was the power of signs and miracles that led the Gentiles to obey God. That does not sound like a spurious conversion to me.

We simply cannot settle for a gospel devoid of power if we want to see the kingdom of God come on earth as the Lord would intend. Signs and miracles were not just for Paul. The fullness of what Christ wants to accomplish through us today will simply not happen apart from *the power of signs and miracles*.

Romans 16

July 7

The God of Peace Will Soon Crush Satan

If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind -1 Corinthians 14:14-15

There is more than a little controversy in the church of God regarding the use of the gift of tongues. What Paul writes in 1 Corinthians sets the parameters for the debate but there is still plenty of disagreement about how to interpret what he writes. The disagreement probably has more to do with certain biases than the indistinctness of his counsel regarding the nature of the gift of tongues and its benefit.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is contrasting the usefulness of the gift of tongues in the corporate setting against that of the gift of prophecy. Whatever good he has to say about the gift of tongues pales in comparison to the superior benefit of the prophetic unction, particularly in the corporate setting. But out of that context, we find the use and benefit of the gift of tongues: "Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God...he utters mysteries with his spirit" (14:2). "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (v4). "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues" (v5). "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (v18).

There are actually three different types of spiritual "glossolalia"

Much of the confusion regarding tongues could be cleared up if people understood that there are actually three different types of spiritual "glossolalia" (Greek for languages). First is the supernatural speaking of earthly languages like that which occurred on the day of Pentecost. Second is the prophetic speaking of a heavenly language that is meant to be interpreted in a gathering of the church (see 1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:5). And third, is the kind that Paul speaks of here in verses 14 and 15. This type of tongue can accurately be called "a prayer language." Paul says, "If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays." He goes on to say that not only can you pray with your spirit, but you can sing with your spirit (v15) and praise God with your spirit (v16) resulting in a thanksgiving that God will receive (v17). No, your mind does not understand and your brother is not edified, but if you pray in tongue, your spirit prays and is edified. And this is good, because, for the most part, the Lord communicates to you Spirit to spirit. If you pray in a tongue you are operating out of your "spirit man" and spiritual revelation will more likely get through to your mind when your spirit is built up and in communion with the Lord. And this is probably why Paul prayed in tongues more than anyone else.

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

July 28

When You Come Together

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. -1 Corinthians 14:1

A lady in the church once told me that if God wanted her to have certain spiritual gifts, including the gift of tongues, he would give them to her. The problem was, she didn't want certain spiritual gifts, including the gift of tongues. So the almost certain result would be that she would never receive these spiritual gifts. But this does not agree with the approach that Paul says we should take when it comes to the gifts of the Spirit.

We are not to take a passive role when it comes to receiving spiritual gifts. After speaking about the way of love, Paul tells us that we should *eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy*. It certainly cannot be denied that, regarding spiritual gifts, *to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good* (1 Co 12:7) and that *the Spirit gives them to each one, just as he determines* (1 Co 12:11). But the fact that he is the one who determines does not mean that we can never desire spiritual gifts—even certain gifts. We cannot presume that we will necessarily be endowed with what we choose nor can we dictate what gifts must come our way. We can't just order off the spiritual gifts menu anything we like. But we can peruse that menu and tell the Father what it is we desire—for the sake of blessing others. If our motives are right, the Father is very much inclined give these good gifts as part of satisfying our hunger for him.

In my own experience, I have specifically sought the Lord for the gift of the word of knowledge—especially to be used in evangelism. Yes, I have had to deal with an element of spiritual pride when the Lord reveals something pertinent regarding a person to whom I am ministering. But the way I figure it, when the revelatory gifts of the Spirit are in operation, people are more likely to be helped and pay attention to the gospel. This is part of the reason why Paul says that we should be especially eager to prophesy. When we prophesy accurately to an unbeliever, *the secrets of his heart will be laid bare and he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you"* (v25).

The Bible says we should *eagerly desire* spiritual gifts. It is the Greek word "zeloo" which means "to be jealous over." Not that we should be jealous of someone else's gift, but that we should be jealous over the full expression of the gift of God in our lives. And this is a far cry from excusing the lack of spiritual gifts in our lives with a passive and unbelieving attitude.

We are not to take a passive role when it comes to receiving spiritual gifts

Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. -Roman 16:19-20

The Rolling Stones, that rock and roll bastion of moral fortitude, have a song entitled, "Sympathy for the Devil." In order to feel for the Devil, you would have to have a warped sense of empathy, a misunderstanding of the character of Satan, or some kind of depraved desire to relate to his ghastly nature. Never forget that Satan is your mortal enemy who *comes only to steal, kill and destroy* (Jn 10:10). If you could see him and know the pain he has caused, you would have no sympathy for him. He is beyond redemption. He is beyond sympathy. We are to have only disdain for the devil. We should only want to see him crushed.

Paul said to the Romans, "*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.*" There is a certain irony in this statement. You don't usually perceive "crushing" someone being associated with "peace." But the destruction of Satan is not at all inconsistent with peace. It should make sense that if you were to crush the one who comes only to steal, kill and destroy—you would be doing peace a big favor. The God of peace must crush Satan because there can never be a comprehensive peace until he is destroyed. It's ironic—but in this case, violence begets peace.

Notice where Satan is when God crushes him—underneath our feet. That is where he belongs. God spoke to the serpent after Eden was lost and told him that the woman's offspring *will crush your head* (Ge 3:15). No sympathy there.

Though we are not to take revenge on others, I believe that God wants us to take revenge on Satan. *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work* (1 Jn 3:8). Jesus said to his disciples, *I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy* (Lk 10:19). Our battle is not with flesh and blood, but with you know who. There will come a day when the saints will triumph and Satan will be completely crushed and silenced by the authority of God. But even now, the authority that we carry will allow us to crush his head as needed. And in so doing—we produce peace.

He is beyond redemption. He is beyond sympathy. We are to have only disdain for the devil.

Our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. -1 Corinthians 1:6-7

There are different kinds of waiting. There is the “doctor’s office” kind. Usually mundane, table magazines required. There is the “waiting up for your late teenager” kind. This is where you discover how imagination fuels anxiety. There is the “late for work, stuck in traffic kind.” Blood pressure beware. Or how about the “waiting for the repairman” kind? Don’t hold your breath for him or her to arrive. Needless to say, none of these forms of “waiting” are particularly delightful.

There are, however, good kinds of waiting: The anticipation of seeing that special person coming through the airport gate. The anticipation of a child on Christmas Eve knowing “one more sleep” and it’s Christmas. The wait that the apostles had in Jerusalem as they were gathered in expectation of the coming of the promised Holy Spirit.

To eagerly await the Lord's return is a sign that you are spiritually fit

The best wait of all is the eager anticipation in the hearts of those who belong to Jesus for his return. To think about what it will be like at that moment when the trumpet of God sounds, the voice of the archangel is heard, the Blessed Savior appears with all the saints who have gone before and we who are alive are taken to eternal bliss, is the most exciting thing imaginable. And, as Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians, he speaks as if it is the most natural thing to be eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus. And for the Christian who longs for his appearing, it is.

Are you waiting *for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ* (Tit 2:13)? Do you *set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed* (1 Pe 1:13)? Are you one of those who *love his appearing* (2 Ti 4:8 KJV)? Do you *eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed?*

To eagerly await the Lord’s return is a sign that you are spiritually fit. It does not mean that you quit your job, move to the mountains, get dressed in a white robe and stare into the clouds. *God will bring about in his own time* the return of Christ (1 Ti 6:15). The best way to be ready for the return of the Master is to be about his business (see Luke 12:42ff). One of the sure signs, however, of spiritual vitality in an individual or a group, is a healthy anticipation and longing for the revealing of Jesus at his second coming. We may not know “how many more sleeps” before he comes, but we sure are looking forward to the day he does.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

July 9

Jews Demand Signs and Greeks Look for Wisdom

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. -1 Corinthians 13:4-7

The following are examples regarding the true nature of love.

Patient: The teacher is glad to explain a concept another time to a student who is having trouble grasping the idea.

Kind: In Aesop’s fable, Androcles shows kindness to the lion by pulling the thorn out of its paw.

Does not envy: You are sincerely happy for your friend who has just received the very same blessing that you are hoping and waiting for.

Does not boast: In the thirty minutes that I spend with Robert Schuller, he never once speaks of himself but is only interested in hearing about me.

Is not proud: You are quick to admit you have done wrong and to seek forgiveness from the ones you have hurt.

Is not rude: You are courteous and allow another driver into the flow of traffic even though you have the right of way.

Is not self-seeking: A young boy agrees to give blood for his sister thinking that it means that he will die in the process.

Is not easily angered: Jesus remains like a sheep that is silent as he is unjustly convicted, beaten and executed.

Keeps no record of wrongs: After World War II, Corrie Ten Boom extends her hand in forgiveness to a guard she recognized from the Nazi concentration camp where her sister died.

Does not delight in evil: David has the perfect opportunity to kill the man who is out to kill him—King Saul, but he refuses.

Rejoices with the truth: You are a prophet. Your message is, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." Nineveh repents and you rejoice.

Always protects: The shepherd, who has ninety-nine other sheep, goes off to find the one who has strayed and is lost.

Always trusts (believes): 365 days a year, Dominic Gacetta disciplines former drug addicts and prostitutes at the L.A. Dream Center.

Always hopes: Week after week, my friend, Judy Baus saves a seat in her crowded church for her unsaved husband, until he finally comes to know Jesus and joins her in worship. Hallelujah!

Always perseveres: Robert McQuilken, the president of Columbia Bible College steps down from his position to take care of his wife who has Alzheimer’s.

1 Corinthians 14:1-12

July 26

Eagerly Desire Spiritual Gifts

Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor...But God...has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 1 Corinthians 12:22-25

There are certain persons within the church whom the natural mind would consider weaker and less distinguished. These are the same ones who would rarely receive any honor in society at large—those considered nerds, loners and misfits—if you’ll pardon the expressions for now. But God has ordained that those who are marginalized and dishonored in the world should receive honor in the church.

Paul is using the analogy that the church of Jesus is one body but many parts. *God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be* (v18) and no one part of the body can say to another, *I don’t need you* (v21). Paul recognizes that just as the human body has parts that are more prominent and recognizable, the church would have some members who would naturally receive more honor and recognition and others who would receive less. So what is the solution to this inequity? We are to give *greater honor to the parts that lacked it and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor.*

You see, Paul says that the *presentable parts need no special treatment* (v24). I as a Pastor receive special treatment all the time. I don’t need any extra. There is a danger in any social group that some people will be seen as “second class citizens.” So, what are we to do? We are to honor those who lack honor and recognize those who lack recognition. Where else are they going to receive the honor and special treatment that the world is not about to give? God is very concerned *that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.*

Paul says, *“Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.”* It is ironic: Those persons whom you would most want to shun are the ones who are most needed to make your church what it ought to be. Your church needs them as much—perhaps more—than they need you. Without these less distinguished members and their full incorporation and honor in the life of your church, your church will never become fully honored or distinguished in the sight of God.

God has ordained that those who are marginalized and dishonored in the world should receive honor in the church

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. -1 Corinthians 1:22-24

It seemed to me that there were two types of people in the seminary I attended: “Jews” who demanded miraculous signs and “Greeks” who were looking for wisdom. The “Jews,” of whom I readily admit I was one, liked to think that we were pretty spiritual. We were horrified by some of the things that the “liberal” professors had to say. We faithfully went to chapel, prayed for revival on campus and looked forward to graduation so we could come down from the ivory tower to the real world of ministry. The “Greeks” (or “Geeks” as some were affectionately known to the hip undergraduates) liked to think that they were pretty intellectual. Seminary was a place of academic stimulation. They were ready to grapple with faith challenging issues and much preferred the round-table discussion to the chapel service.

Of course, this analogy comes from Paul’s characterization of the Jews and the Greeks in his letter to the Corinthians. Generally speaking, the Jews valued spiritual experience and the Greeks valued intellectual stimulation. To the Jews who wanted a sign and the Greeks who sought for wisdom, the gospel fare was the same: *“We preach Christ crucified.”* You can get caught up in seeking signs or you can spend yourself on academic pursuits; but what you need most is to know Jesus. As Paul said to the Corinthians, *“I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”* (2:2).

Jesus can meet the aspirations of both Jews and Greeks because he is *the power of God and the wisdom of God.* Those who are saved know him as such, whether Jew or Greek. But to those who are blinded by spiritual pride and to those who are blinded by intellectual pride, Jesus is *a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.*

So, whether you are a “Jew” who seeks a sign, or a “Greek” who values wisdom, lay it down for the sake of knowing Jesus. And when you preach and teach, if you just *preach Christ crucified*, you will see that Jesus will be both the power of God and the wisdom of God.

You can get caught up in seeking signs or you can spend yourself on academic pursuits; but what you need most is to know Jesus.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. -1 Corinthians 2:4-5

The gospel is always more effective when it results in people looking to God and not to the preacher or in the eloquence of the message. What is better—that someone is persuaded by the eloquence and superior wisdom of the speaker or by the power of God?

Reflecting on the time he first came to Corinth with the gospel, Paul said, *“I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God...I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.”* It is not that Paul couldn't have come with “eloquence and superior wisdom.” He was trained under Gamaliel and was at the top of his class (see Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14). He was no intellectual slouch. But he knew that if he was to be faithful to the *testimony about God* (v1), God would have to be the one to confirm the testimony. So Paul would not trust in any ability he might have to bring *wise and persuasive words* to convince his hearers of the truth of the gospel. It was a *demonstration of the Spirit's power* that was most needed to produce genuine converts to Christ. That realization humbled Paul and produced in him *weakness, fear and much trembling* regarding his high calling to preach the gospel. But that, of course, was a good thing because pride disqualifies a man or woman as true ambassador of God every time.

You see, if a person's faith rests on the eloquence and wisdom of a gifted communicator, all it takes is a more eloquent and gifted communicator to come along to convert them to another viewpoint. But if a person experiences the power of God through a weak and humble servant, then they will be truly convinced and all the glory will go to God for the revelation of the truth about Jesus. If the gospel comes *with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction* (1 Th 1:5) then people will put their faith in God because they will know that what they have seen and heard has gone beyond any human wisdom or understanding.

Unfortunately, it seems that we are long on *men's wisdom* and short on *a demonstration of the Spirit's power*. The sad and documented truth is that of the North Americans who “accepted Christ” a year ago, the majority are not serving him today. A large part of the problem is that these “converts” knew only the wisdom of men when what they really needed was to know the power of God.

1 Corinthian 3

July 11

Fire Will Test the Quality of Each Man's Work

After supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:25-26

So many churches have taken what the Bible calls “The Lord's Supper” and turned it into something much more than what it is meant to be. But Paul conveys the simple essence of the meaning of the Lord's Supper when he says, *“Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”*

Of the three most common names that Christians have for this observance, only one is truly a designation that the Bible uses: “The Lord's Supper.” The other two, “Communion” and “The Eucharist” (from the Greek word, “eucharisteo,” meaning, “to give thanks”) are somewhat contrived (from 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:24) and belie the original and primary intent that Jesus meant for the observance.

What is the Lord's Supper really about? Let's start with what it is not about. It is not a sacrament whereby the grace of God is, in essence, imparted through the elements. I attended a church service one time where I intended to participate in the observance of the Lord's Supper, but I read this quote in the bulletin: “If you are a baptized Christian believing that the forgiveness of sins is found in the bread and the wine, you are welcome to join in the celebration of communion.” Much to my disappointment, I had to decline participation because I did not, in fact, believe that the forgiveness of my sins was found in the elements of the bread and the wine. The Lord's Supper points to what Jesus did so that my sins could be forgiven, for which I am thankful, but if forgiveness of sin could be gained in the observance of a ritual then our trust would be in that ritual and not in Jesus himself.

The Lord's Supper is not primarily a time of communion with the Lord or even a time of celebratory thanksgiving. It is a commemoration of the death of Jesus. The words of institution are: *“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me”* (Lk 22:19; 1 Co 11:24). Why are we to do it? In remembrance of him. What does Paul say we do every time we observe this ordinance of the Lord? Receive forgiveness? Enjoy communion with the Lord? Celebrate salvation? No. *“Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”*

1 Corinthians 12

July 24

Its Parts Should Have Equal Concern for Each Other

What is better—that someone is persuaded by the eloquence and superior wisdom of the speaker or by the power of God?

The Lord's Supper is not primarily a time of communion with the Lord or even a time of celebratory thanksgiving. It is a commemoration of the death of Jesus.

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. -1 Corinthians 11:3

Headship and the order of things...God has created a hierarchy of authority and order for all those living on the earth. And if we want to be in harmony with the created order and function as God intended, we need to recognize and submit to that hierarchy.

Of what does that hierarchy consist? First, as Paul outlines it, *the head of every man is Christ*. Jesus is Lord. All authority in heaven and on the earth has been given to him by the Father. *God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything...* (Eph 1:22). Jesus is not only head of the church, he has headship over every human on the face of the earth. Headship means authority. Headship is where authority lies. The headmaster is highest authority in a school. Headquarters is “the center of authority in any organization” (Webster’s). The “head honcho” is—well...you know. And it just so happens that Jesus is head honcho.

Intrinsic in the role of headship is covering and protection

Second, *the head of the woman is man*. This does not mean, as some might interpret, that just because I am a man, I have authority over every woman that I meet—Paul does not say that the head of every woman is man. Nor does it mean that, in human organizations, it is out of the question for a woman to have authority over a man (though because of the natural order of things it is more of a challenge for a man to submit to a woman boss). I think it means two things: That in the natural order of things, men carry the general responsibility of headship over women and, specifically in a marriage relationship, the man is to be the head of the home. Many would say that such a worldview is neanderthal. They chafe at the very thought of a hierarchy where women are subordinate to men. But biblical authority always works because it always serves since intrinsic in the role of headship is covering and protection.

Third, *the head of Christ is God*. Again, we see that the Father and the Son are not equal in authority. The Son receives his authority from the Father and is subordinate to him (see 1 Corinthians 15:27). All those who exercise authority must first learn to submit to authority. Notice that Jesus *was heard because of his reverent submission* to the Father (Heb 5:7).

There is a God-given hierarchy of headship. Those who recognize this will live in harmony with God’s purposes and be able to properly exercise their own authority for the good of others.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

July 23

You Proclaim the Lord's Death until He Comes

The fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. -1 Corinthians 3:13-15

My high school physics teacher gained some notoriety because of a physics contest that started in our school that became a citywide competition. Each member of our physics class was given glue, a specific amount of balsa wood and the task of building a weight bearing bridge of a certain height and width. We all built our bridges and the big day arrived when we brought them to be tested. As the weights were increased, bridges began to break. One by one, the students with the weaker bridges (including me) saw them destroyed because they were unable to support the increasing weight. The bridges that were capable of bearing a specified amount of weight moved on to the city competition.

It is not about building a business, an organization, a ministry or even a church. It is about building people.

Whether you know it or not, you are building a structure that will be tested on that day called *the Day* (v13). This testing, Paul says, will not be by weight, but by fire. Paul was speaking of his work with the Corinthian saints and said that by the grace of God he *laid a foundation as an expert builder* (v10). Others were now building on that foundation and Paul was wondering what kind of work was being done—what kind of building was being built on the foundation that he had laid. Paul said that whatever work had been done—whatever kind of building had been built—it would be shown for what it is on the Day of Judgment. *The Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work* (v13). If a person builds with *gold, silver and costly stones, what he has built will survive, and he will receive his reward*. If he builds with *wood, hay or straw, what he has built will be burned up. He will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames*.

Do you think about what and how you are building? Are you building at all? And if you are building, will it be destroyed on the big day or will it pass the test and produce a reward? It is not about building a business, an organization, a ministry or even a church. It is about building people who become strong in Jesus and are who able to build up others in the faith. It is about the kingdom of God being established in lives and communities.

A day—the Day—is coming when what you build will be tested. What do you think will be the result?

1 Corinthians 4

July 12

Do Not Go Beyond What Is Written

Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. -1 Corinthians 4:6

The great American evangelist, Charles Finney, came under heavy attack from a number of the church leaders of his day for the establishment of what they called "the new measures." Among these new measures that Finney was implementing in his ministry was what we know today as the "altar call." Finney would call people to repentance and to Christ by inviting them forward to kneel at what was known as a "mourner's bench." At the time, Finney's detractors said that what he was practicing was not biblical and that he had gone *beyond what is written*. Today, of course, the use of "altar calls" is endorsed by a host Bible believing churches—though it must be admitted that you cannot readily find the use of a mourner's bench or altar call in the Bible. Did Finney go too far? How are we to interpret and apply what Paul said to the Corinthians when he said, "Do not go beyond what is written?"

Finney's detractors said that what he was practicing was not biblical and that he had gone beyond what is written

Paul's statement must be taken in context, though it is difficult to understand—even in its context. In fact, it seems that the context makes it more difficult to understand as Paul is applying this saying to how the Corinthians are to view his and Apollos' ministry and how they should not take pride in one man's ministry over the other. The saying, "Do not go beyond what is written," is not found in the Old Testament, so, where does it come from? The best explanation is probably that the saying became common when it came to interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures. It is a good saying. No one who takes the authority of the Scriptures seriously would be comfortable with any doctrine and practice that goes beyond what the Bible intends to teach. And perhaps that is the crux of the debate regarding the "new measures." Is "going beyond what is written" doing something that is not specifically found in the Bible, or is it doing something that specifically goes against a tenet of the Scriptures? If the former is true then we had better remove the church organs and stop giving altar calls.

"Do not go beyond what is written," is great ammunition for those who would want to shoot down any doctrine and practice with which they are uncomfortable—like Finney's new measures. But unless they can show that the things to which they object clearly violate the teaching of Scripture, it would be better to save their shooting for another day and a better target.

1 Corinthians 5

July 13

The Bread of Sincerity and Truth

Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. -1 Corinthians 10:19-20

A couple in our church was blessed with their firstborn child a few years back. Sometime afterward, one of the grandparents wanted to take the child to be part of a ceremony where they sacrificed certain food and other items in thanksgiving and for good luck. The couple asked my wife and me if they should allow it in order to appease the grandparent. They knew that there was no real God behind the idols that would be involved. Moreover, they had dedicated their child to the Lord's protection. Would it be ok? Our advice came from Paul's words to the Corinthians: *Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.*

Demons are attached to and energized by idol worship

If you wonder how demons work, this is one of the ways. They are attached to and energized by idol worship. This fact becomes revoltingly obvious as you enter a Hindu temple. Sure, the objects of worship there are strange to most of us, but there is more than unfamiliarity to make the spiritually discerning uncomfortable. Paul is clear: A sacrifice offered to an idol is offered to a demon. It may not be tolerant, politically correct or intellectually enlightened to say so, but such worship mobilizes and invigorates demonic forces. The same can be said for all false worship, including Chinese religion, Native pow wows, and Mary worship, as just three examples of many.

The reality that such worship enlivens demonic activity is understandable in light of the fact that Satan and his angels lost their place in heaven because they wanted to be worshiped. They still want to be worshiped. So you can see how it is that a sacrifice to an idol is really a sacrifice to a demon. Demonic activity has been behind all idolatrous forms of worship because demons like nothing better than to divert worship from the true God to themselves. Part of the reason for the prohibition of pagan idolatry in the Old Testament was to prevent the proliferation of demonic activity in the land.

So what are the implications for us? In a society where idolatrous and false worship is increasingly tolerated, we Christians have to be more discerning and willing to name idol worship for what it is: The worship of demons. As Paul said, *I do not want you to be participants with demons.*

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

July 22

The Head

Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. -1 Corinthians 9:26-27

There have always been those who have recognized the sins of the flesh and have taken undue recourse in the battle to subdue the carnal impulses that reside within. Historically known as ascetics, these persons concluded that a higher spiritual state and better standing before God required a disciplined religious regimen which included harsh treatment of the body. Before we dismiss completely out of hand the actions of the ascetics, we should consider that Paul said, “*I beat my body and make it my slave.*” Paul wanted to be vigilant against the sins of the flesh lest after preaching to others, he himself would be *disqualified for the prize.*

Human effort to restrain the sinful nature can never lead to true freedom. On another occasion, Paul referred to humanly contrived religious rules, “*Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!*” concluding, “*Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence*” (Col 2:23). With that being said, how would you like to be able to actually restrain sensual indulgence? How would you like to, in fact, make your body your slave, becoming its master instead of it mastering you? How would you like to be able to thankfully enjoy the natural appetites that God has given while subjecting those appetites to the control of the Holy Spirit?

Ascetics were wrong in viewing appetites themselves as inherently evil but they were correct about one thing: The physical body and its appetites need to be subjected to the mastery of the will. When Paul used the word “beat” he meant to “press or hold under and not let up.” It is bringing your physical being under subjection. It is much like what Olympic athletes have to do in their preparation for competition. In a sense, they “beat” their bodies and make them their slaves. That is why Paul uses the illustration of an athlete and talks about the fact that they go into *strict training* (v25).

So, should we all become ascetics? No, but when your appetites start to have mastery over your will, it is time to put your body under subjection. If athletes put their bodies under the subjection of the lordship of their goals, why can't we, by the power of Holy Spirit, put our bodies under a higher lordship—our Savior, Jesus Christ?

1 Corinthians 10:14–11:1

July 21

The Sacrifices of Pagans Are Offered to Demons

Let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. -1 Corinthians 5:8

Paul was dealing with a situation of sexual immorality in the church at Corinth which did *not occur even among pagans* (1 Co 5:1). The ongoing sin which had been left unaddressed was like *yeast that works through the whole batch of dough* (v6). The Corinthians were instructed to “*get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast*” (v7). Paul then compared the bread used during the Jewish Passover festival with the Christian life. Just as the Passover bread was to be eaten without yeast, the Christian life is to be lived without *the yeast of malice and wickedness*. Instead, the festival of the Christian life should be kept with *the bread of sincerity and truth*. That is why the Lord's Supper, which, in a sense, is the Passover of Jesus, is to be observed with sincere hearts.

When Paul speaks of a life of sincerity and truth, he is speaking of genuineness, truthfulness, honesty and forthrightness. He is speaking of a life without guile, deceit or hypocrisy; a life without malice or wickedness. Sincerity and truth are indispensable to life in Christ. And, they are very much related. To be sincere is to be truthful. You can't tell a lie and be sincere. The sincere person seeks to hide nothing. The sincere person welcomes the light of truth. By the same token, truth relies on a sincere person to tell it like it is. To distort what is true for one's own gain disqualifies one to be called "sincere." This is the sense in which sincerity and truth (truthfulness) are related.

But, while sincerity and truthfulness go hand in hand, it is possible for a person to be completely sincere and, at the same time, totally oblivious to “the truth.” To accept the notion that to be sincere is to know the truth is ludicrous—though such thinking promoted by the spirit of this age. Kamikaze pilots died, sincerely believing that they would be rewarded with paradise for their sacrifice. Jihad suicide bombers believe the same. Sincere? Yes. Deceived? Sad to say, yes. It is the truth, not sincerity, that sets us free (see John 8:32).

But it is the truthful person who is most likely to find the truth. It is the one *in whom there is nothing false* (Jn 1:47) who can best understand and emulate the ideals of the kingdom of God. And it is with the *bread of sincerity and truth* that the observance of the Christian life must be kept.

1 Corinthians 6:1–11

July 14

One Brother Goes to Law against Another

When your appetites start to have mastery over your will, it is time to put your body under subjection.

Sincerity and truth are indispensable to life in Christ

If you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers. -1 Corinthians 6:4-6

Part of what's wrong with our society is the proliferation of personal lawsuits. And part of what's wrong with the church is that, mostly, we have no viable agency for the settling of serious disputes between Christians who often end up staging their fights in the law courts of the ungodly. This was a problem in the Corinthian church—one which Paul needed to address. Unfortunately, Paul's discussion of the subject has not lost an ounce of pertinence for today. Chances are, you've seen it. *One brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers.*

What was Paul's advice regarding these lawsuits? It was twofold: First of all, don't do it. What in the world makes you think that you are going to get a better decision from a judge who, for all you know, spent the previous night with a prostitute? Getting justice in our court system is little more than a craps shoot. More importantly than that—when Christians fight each other in court, it is a terrible witness to the world. It's like siblings who fight each other over their parents' estate. It is shameful. It's not that Christians don't have disputes. But how they handle them gives evidence to the reality of Christ in their lives. Regarding this, Paul said, *“Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated”* (v7).

Paul's other advice is to find someone, *even of little account in the church*, to be an arbiter of the dispute. Your grievance is important. If you've been wronged, there should be a channel to redress it. Every church needs a spelled out, biblically based, protocol regarding the handling of disputes. But it seems that these things rarely get worked out in the context of the church. It is typically because people don't want to submit to godly authority or because of a lack of biblical authority operational in the church. It does get more complicated when you have a dispute between Christians belonging to two different churches, but the pastors of those churches should be wise and mature enough mediate and arbitrate the difficulty.

Can you go to court against an unbeliever? Yes. Should you report a fellow Christian to the governing authorities if a crime has been committed or if someone's welfare is at stake? Yes. But if you want recourse for a wrong done to you personally, you have to work it out in the context of the church or you forget it.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

July 15

Everything Is Permissible for Me

It's not that Christians don't have disputes. But how they handle them gives evidence to the reality of Christ in their lives.

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews...To those not having the law I became like one not having the law...as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. -1 Corinthians 9:20-22

Contextualization. It's the term that missiologists use to describe the process of relating to another culture in order to communicate the gospel in their context of life. And Paul, perhaps the greatest missionary who has yet lived, believed in it.

It used to be in the western missionary movement that the missionaries who went out from Europe and North America were intent on converting the “pagans” not only to Christ but to their culture. They entered a culture but they never entered into the culture. But Paul had a different approach: *To the Jews I became like a Jew...To those not having the law I became like one not having the law...To the weak I became weak. I have become all things to all men...* Paul wanted to be relevant so that the gospel would be relevant. His aim was to become like those he was trying to reach as to better reach them. He wanted to bring the gospel into their context in a way that they could understand. The way that he preached in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch was different from the way he preached in the Areopagus in Athens. His message was always the same: *Jesus Christ and him crucified* (1 Cor 2:2) but he and his methods changed to fit the context.

People with a religious spirit would be uncomfortable with the idea of using *all possible means* in order to reach the unsaved. They confuse methodology with the message and approve only of the means to which they can relate—which makes them gospel bigots. But if we are going to see people saved, we have to approach them on their level in a way that they can understand. The last I checked, the command was for us to “go,” not to wait for them to come. And by chance, if they did come, what would they find? In some cases it would be a group of people stuck in a time warp because they confuse the way church was done forty years ago with the essence of the gospel.

The ultimate example of contextualization is the incarnation. Jesus became like us in order to save us. Paul's words echo the mission of the man from heaven: *To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.* Contextualization is not just a modern missionary fad. It is the sentiment of both Paul and the Savior himself.

1 Corinthians 9:24-10:13

July 20

I Beat My Body and Make it My Slave

They entered a culture but they never entered into the culture

...there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. -1 Corinthians 8:5-6

I'm not a classic Trinitarian. I believe that there are more distinctions in the Godhead than standard evangelical and reformed theologies would sanction. In Paul's discussion about idols and *so-called gods*, he makes a statement that marks an interesting distinction between God the Father and the Lord Jesus. Here is Paul's statement: *There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.*

This is a statement where the prepositions carry the meaning. Different Greek prepositions can be translated so many different ways depending on the context but, in this case, it is not so complicated. Look at the verse above and notice the three prepositions used: *From*, *for* and *through*. The word translated *from* is the Greek word, "ek," which means "out of." *For* is "eis," which occurs more than 1700 times in the New Testament and in this context is translated either "in" or "for." *Through* is "dia," which can have different meanings depending on the context, but is most often translated "through." So, Paul makes the distinction, through the use of prepositions, that God the Father is the source and the receiver of all life and Jesus is the agent through which that life is given and carried out.

Regarding the issue of the nature of the Godhead (the three distinct personalities that encompass divinity), this little verse has something to say. Affirming monotheism, Paul says that there is one God. Who is that? It is the Father. And there is one Lord. Who is that? It is Jesus. Does this mean that Jesus is not eternal, divine or in very nature, God? No. But it does go against the grain of classic Trinitarianism which would use the phrase, "God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit." The problem is that "God the Son" is not a particularly biblical or helpful phrase—I see it as theologically lazy. I believe that we need to be more accurate in defining the divinity of Jesus, the eternal Son of God. And Paul's definition of the distinct roles of God the Father and the Lord Jesus is helpful in doing that.

Jesus is equal to God in nature but not in function or rank (see John 14:28 and 1 Corinthians 15:27-28). And the Spirit of God must be subordinate to the Father and the Son because he is not worshiped in the Scriptures. These things point to the idea that we must be more vigorous in our explanations of who Jesus is in relation to the Father.

Jesus is equal to God in nature but not in function or rank

1 Corinthians 9:1-23

July 19

I Have Become All Things to All Men

"Everything is permissible for me"--but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"--but I will not be mastered by anything. -1 Corinthians 6:12

This scripture has been an invaluable "rule of thumb" for both my personal walk with the Lord and my ministry as a pastor. When it comes to living in the liberty that we have in Christ, these precepts provide two guardrails that allow us to securely enjoy and profit from the road that leads to life.

It seems as though Paul gets a revelation while he is addressing the carnality of the Corinthian believers. It is evident from Paul's letters to them that they were a church that could have had as a motto, "Anything goes." So, in his letters he gives them a number of specific "do's and don'ts." But in the midst of his rebuking and correcting the church at Corinth for their worldly ways, he makes a statement that is a profound reflection on the gospel revolution: *"Everything is permissible for me--but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me--but I will not be mastered by anything."*

Some contend that when Paul said, *"Everything is permissible for me,"* he wasn't speaking literally. The NIV has the statement in quotation marks as if to say that these are not really Paul's words, but someone else's. The rationale is that Paul would not make such a statement to a church where there was widespread division, unchecked sexual immorality, contentious lawsuits and disorderly worship. But the fact is that Christ has *canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us* (Co 2:14). The law is perfect in what it does—making us conscious of sin, but in Christ we live under a different standard than the written code.

So Paul is saying to the church where anything goes, "Everything is permissible." But he is also saying, "In the exercise of your freedom, always ask yourselves two questions: 'Is it beneficial' and, 'Are you being mastered by it?'" Do you see the genius of the Holy Spirit's approach? These are the two questions that will preserve the quality and the freedom of your Christian life. If something is not truly beneficial, then why do it? And if what is permissible to do becomes a compulsion then, obviously, you are no longer free. If the Corinthian church had been guided by these two questions then division, immorality, lawsuits and inconsiderate worship would not have found their way into the church.

So, don't worry about if something is "permissible." Just honestly answer these two questions and you'll stay safe and blessed.

These are the two questions that will preserve the quality and the freedom of your Christian life

1 Corinthians 7:1-24

July 16

But If She Does

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. - 1 Corinthians 7:10-11

The New Testament does not allow for divorce apart from adultery, but it does allow for separation. You can tell by the tenor of what Paul says to the Corinthians that separation is not God's plan "A," but obviously, it is sometimes the most necessary and beneficial course of action. But, according to Paul's instructions, if a man or woman separates from a spouse who has not been sexually unfaithful, he or she must be resigned to remain single or else be reconciled to that spouse.

The Corinthians had written to Paul, asking him (see 7:1) about some matters pertaining to divorce and separation. Just as it was an issue in Paul's day and in Jesus' day, it is an issue in our day. The gospels do not deal with the subject of separation—only divorce and remarriage. And Paul has no "advice" on the matter of separation—only a command from the Lord: *A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.*

The reason separation is allowable and divorce is not, is because separation is not final

It is interesting to note that after giving a command that a wife must not separate from her husband Paul says, "But if she does . . ." Is Paul inconsistent? The way I read Paul is that he does not want to promote the idea of separation but he realizes that there will be cases where it happens. Yes, there are times when it is necessary—for the welfare of the mistreated and to establish a new blueprint for the future of a marriage. If a wife needs (not just wants) to live apart from her husband, she does have that choice in the Lord. But she is not free in the Lord to go looking for someone new. Unless her husband dies or has broken the marital oneness through adultery, a wife may be separated or even legally divorced from her husband—but in the eyes of God, she is still married. And if that's the case, then if she remarries, she commits adultery (see Mark 10:4-12).

Why is the Lord so stringent in these matters? Doesn't he want us to be happy? Certainly, but our highest calling is not to be happy; it is to be faithful. There is too much at stake with divorce—especially when there are children involved. The reason separation is allowable and divorce is not, is because separation is not final. With separation the door has not been closed to reconciliation—in fact, it sometimes helps the process. But even though divorce and remarriage is not the unforgivable sin, it destroys that which God established from the beginning and closes the door to something that is always in his heart and will: reconciliation.

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

July 17

Those Who Marry Will Face Many Troubles

Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. - 1 Corinthians 7:27-28

I don't mean to discourage those who have found true love but as far as I can tell, Paul is right: *Those who marry will face many troubles in this life.* So, for the sake of the kingdom, and perhaps your peace of mind, think about remaining single.

Paul makes a case for staying single. In fact, he makes a case that *each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him* (1 Co 7:20). Why? Because *the time is short* (v29). Because *this world in its present form is passing away* (v31). Because *night is coming when no one can work* (Jn 9:4). Paul was zealous for the kingdom of God and wanted to make the most of every opportunity (see Ephesians 5:16). His desire was that others would be able to do the same.

There are many advantages to remaining single

Paul explains that *an unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband* (vs 32-34). The truth is—if you want a good marriage, you have to work at it; and that takes time and energy. I know of no exception to the rule. And besides—the thing that Paul says about those who marry facing many troubles? It just happens to be true. We all have "stuff" which is brought to the surface by the innate pressure of the intimacy of marriage. The current divorce rate (even in the church) is an indication that marriage will cause a lot more problems than it will solve.

Yes, there is such a thing as nuptial bliss; it is a gift from God and I am happy to say that I have experienced it. And yes, I do believe in marriages that are made in heaven. But as far as the kingdom is concerned, there are many advantages to remaining single. Not everyone will find it easy—in fact, it seems that it is a small minority who can. But Jesus said, "*The one who can accept this should accept it*" (Mt 19:12).

Most people would choose marriage over remaining single. But remember, there is a certain amount of trouble (too much for some) and a whole lot of work involved in marriage. Remaining single is an excellent option you may want to consider.

1 Corinthians 8

July 18

There Is but One God, the Father