

For the Sake of the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] People make sacrifices for the things that they really want and love, right, and everyone does. People give up donuts, right, frappuccinos and chocolate chip cookies so that they could lose some pounds, right, and look better.

People give up their social life in order to work hard and get recognized and promoted in the workplace. Mothers give up their professions so that they could raise their children.

And by the number and kinds of sacrifices that people are willing to make for a certain thing, we can discern how important that thing really is for that person.

And how important is the gospel to you? The gospel is the saving message of the person and work of Jesus Christ, that he lived, died, and rose again to pay the penalty of our sins and give us new life and fellowship with God.

Have you made any lifestyle changes for the sake of the gospel in order to make the gospel known to others? Have you made any sacrifices for the sake of the gospel?

[1 : 0 7] We as Christians can often be sinfully apathetic and lethargic. And so through exhortation and by offering himself as an example, Paul teaches us in this passage that Christians should subject every aspect of their lives for the sake of the gospel.

And I'll unpack that main point in three sections. First, is the support for the gospel in verses 1 to 14. And secondly, sacrifice for the gospel in verses 15 to 23.

And then lastly, self-control for the gospel in verses 24 to 27. In the last chapter, Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers not to eat meat sacrificed to idols at the pagan feasts because they might make their fellow Christian brothers who have a weaker conscience stumble by unwittingly encouraging them to partake in such meals and tempting them to back to their formal associations with idolatry.

So after that, he concluded that chapter with this personal resolution in chapter 8, verse 13. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat lest I make my brother stumble.

And it's that personal resolution that prompts Paul now to talk about yet another way in which he has been sacrificing his rights for the sake of other believers. And that brings us to chapter 9.

[2 : 2 6] And here, Paul talks about how he has every right as an apostle to receive financial support for his gospel ministry from the Corinthian church, but that he has intentionally sacrificed that right for the sake of the gospel.

But Paul is not merely offering himself as an example here in this passage to be emulated. There's another underlying issue that Paul is addressing because we know from 1 Corinthians chapter 4, 3 to 5, that some of the Corinthian believers were examining Paul, judging him, and challenging his apostleship.

So Paul had to remind them that he is not accountable to them ultimately, but to God, and that he has to serve him. So he said in chapter 4, verses 3 to 4, With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.

In fact, I do not even judge myself, for I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. And then if you look at the verse 3 of this passage, he says, This is my defense to those who would examine me.

The word examine there is the same word for a judge that was used early in chapter 4. So Paul is now directly addressing the people who are challenging his apostleship and examining him and judging him.

[3 : 39] And this is his defense, and he begins this. So he's really killing two birds with one stone. So on the one hand, he's teaching the principle of self-sacrifice for the sake of the gospel.

On the other hand, he's defending his apostleship. So he's doing both of those things in this passage. Now, the Corinthian believers found several things objectionable about Paul. We know, for example, from chapters 1 and 2, that the Corinthian believers dismissed Paul's message of Christ crucified as this elementary teaching.

And they despised Apostle Paul because they thought that he lacked worldly wisdom and eloquence. And here in this chapter, we find another one of their objections to Apostle Paul, and that is that he refused to accept compensation from the Corinthian church.

And so you would think that, I mean, that's kind of weird, right, to think, if he's going to serve you for free, why shouldn't you be happy about it? But they actually resented that fact. And Paul talks about that directly in his second letter to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 11, 7 to 12.

And the reason for that is this. This is the situation. In the Roman Empire, there were several kinds of philosophers who traveled from town to town to address audiences, to gain followers, and to make money, right?

[4 : 57] They were compensated in several different ways. They made their living in several different ways. The first way for these itinerant philosophers was to rely on a wealthy patron who used them as feature speakers at their lavish banquets and lectures.

And so they would get supported by these patrons. That was one way. The second way was to charge fees just for their teaching services. Whenever they would teach, they would charge a fee. The third way was to rely on public charity and beg, ask for donations.

And the fourth, and this was by far the most despised way in the ancient world, was to work with one's own hands, to do manual labor, to supply oneself.

Most of the itinerant philosophers saw that way of making a living as beneath their social standing. And because of that, Paul, when the Apostle Paul, the esteemed apostle, refused compensation from the Corinthians when they wanted, even though they were willing to provide it, when he became a tent maker and worked with his hands to provide for himself, this irked the Corinthians to no small degree because it seemed to them that Paul was degrading himself before their eyes and cheapening his message.

And this may be related to what marketing experts nowadays call price-quality heuristic. It's a phenomenon where consumers generally evaluate higher-priced items with having higher quality, even though that's not necessarily the case, right?

[6 : 25] That's why Apple can't afford to sell a \$1,000 phone, even though it's not three times the value. It doesn't have its actual value. It's not three times that of other smartphones.

But its perceived value is higher because of the branding, right? So in a similar way, conversely, when Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthians free of charge, the Corinthians began to devalue Paul and his ministry.

And soon they challenged Paul's apostleship itself, saying that the reason why he did not take compensation was because he was not a true apostle and therefore could not commend the price of an apostle.

So that's where the Corinthians are and therefore accusing him. So now Paul finds himself in this really awkward place, right, of having, on the one hand, to defend his own apostleship and his right to their financial support.

On the other hand, he has to also explain why he voluntarily forfeited that right for their sake. So in verse 1 here, Paul's launching into that defense his right to support for the gospel.

[7 : 26] He says, read with me verse 1, Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Paul's appealing to his apostolic freedom to behave as he has been doing.

And the fact that he mentions having seen Jesus in verse 1 shows that he sees himself as one of the capital A apostles, right? The apostles who were directly appointed and commissioned by Christ with authority to lay the foundation for the church once and for all.

And so even though Paul never saw the resurrected Christ in the flesh, he did have a vision of Christ. He saw the ascended Christ who appeared to him on the Damascus road.

And because of that, Paul understood that encounter with Christ as his apostolic commissioning. And because of that, he was an apostle, even though he didn't see the resurrected Christ.

So because he didn't see the resurrected Christ in the flesh, he referred to himself as an apostle untimely born, he says later in chapter 15 of this letter. But nevertheless, he did see Jesus and he is an apostle.

[8 : 27] So he says, am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Then Paul continues his series of rhetorical questions in verses 1 to 2. Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?

If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. Because apostles were charged with pioneering ministries, beginning churches where there were no churches.

Because of that, churches that existed marked to serve as proof of someone's apostleship. And so Paul says that the Corinthian church is his workmanship in the Lord.

And for that reason, even if other people disputed his apostleship, surely they could not. For, Paul says, you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. The very existence of the Corinthian church serves to prove that Paul was an apostle.

They themselves were his seal, the authenticating mark, the signature of Paul's apostleship. I mean, you could almost feel the pain of Paul having to defend himself in this way to the very church that he planted and loved and cared for.

[9 : 33] It's like being questioned and judged by his own workmanship. It's like losing the affection and esteem of your own children. And then Paul begins his defense in earnest in verses 3 to 6.

Paul expects the answer yes to all of these questions because they all deal with the rights of the apostles to have their needs furnished by the saints to whom they minister.

Local churches should provide for their basic needs as apostles and not only for them, but also for their wives if they are married and traveling with them. And so that the ministers of the gospel do not have to provide for themselves with additional work.

That's what Paul's talking about here. And then in verses 7 to 10, he illustrates this with several examples. He says in verse 7, who serves as a soldier at his own expense, who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit, or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk.

We don't expect soldiers who put their lives in danger to fight our wars to do so at their own expense. So why then would we expect gospel ministers whom we thrust forward in our spiritual warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil to fight at their own expense?

[11 : 03] Likewise, we don't expect a vinedresser who plants and harvests grapevines to then afterward to have to go somewhere else to purchase grapes to eat and buy wine to drink.

Nor do we expect a shepherd or a dairy farmer to not drink any of the milk that his own flock produces. So why then would we expect gospel ministers who shepherd God's flock to derive some provision and benefit from them as well?

Why should we not expect that? And Paul insists that these analogies don't merely demonstrate a human principle of fair treatment and equity, but it demonstrates a divine law.

So he writes in verses 8 to 10, Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the law say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.

Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowmen should plow in hope, and the thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.

[12 : 11] The word law can represent the entire Old Testament, but here, because it says law of Moses, specifically it's referring to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. And more specifically, Paul's quoting directly from Deuteronomy 25.4, which says, You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.

That's an interesting proof text to use, because it doesn't deal with humans, right? It deals with animals. It refers to the ancient agricultural practice of using an ox to draw a threshing sledge over a grain field, so that as the sledge goes over the field, it separates the kernels from the stalk, and so that they can later collect those for consumption and for selling, or whatever it might be.

And some people, when they were using an ox to draw the threshing sledge, they muzzle the ox, so that the ox could not consume any of the precious kernels that fall as he's working to feed the kernels.

But the Israelites, however, were forbidden from muzzling the ox while they threshed out the grain, so that the ox can enjoy some of the fruit of its labor. Now, what's interesting about it is, if you actually go back to the original context of Deuteronomy 25, it's surrounded both before and after by all these commands that deal with how we're supposed to relate to one another, how we're supposed to love our neighbors.

And this is the only command in that context that deals with animals, right? So if you look at that and you consider that, it shows us that, yes, sure, God intended that law to express his care for the oxen, but it was more importantly intended to illustrate a broader principle that's supposed to be applied to human beings.

[13 : 54] That's what Paul is saying here, right? Was it really for oxen that God put that there? No. It's so that if the oxen deserve to get some of the fruit of their labor, how much more the plowman who's actually driving the oxen, should he not get paid for his labor as well?

So Paul adds in verses 9 to 10, is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak certainly for our sake? It was written for our sake because the plowmen should plow in hope and the thresher, thresh in hope, of sharing in the crop.

Gospel ministers deserve to be supported for their gospel ministry. Even though here Paul's specifically arguing for the apostolic right, this principle can be applied to gospel ministers in general because Paul uses this exact same argument and citation in 1 Timothy 5, 17 to 18 to say that elders of the church should be paid.

So he says there, let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching, for the scripture says, you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain, and the laborer deserves his wages.

So this is a broader principle that we can apply to other ministers as well. So this is a very forceful and lengthy argument, but Paul's not done, and he says in verses 11 to 12, if we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

[15 : 11] If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Some people might argue, well, a farmer eats of what he produces because he's producing, but a minister, he's sowing spiritual seeds.

So shouldn't they be satisfied with spiritual fruit that he gets to reap from that? Why should we also compensate him with physical fruit? I mean, that's an objection that someone could raise.

Paul anticipates that, but instead of that argument, he turns that argument, that trajectory, on its own head. And so basically what he's saying here is, it is true that the spiritual rewards are enough in and of itself, but the problem remains that they still need to eat, right?

And so Paul says this, he says, if the gospel ministers are sowing spiritual things among you, which are of eternal significance and value, then why do you begrudge them material support, which is comparably insignificant?

If you yourselves derive eternal benefits from their service, is it so hard to furnish them with temporal benefits for their service? When they willingly feed your soul, do you do right by refusing to feed their body?

[16 : 19] Now, we would not think twice, right, about paying our electrician or a plumber for their labors. Why do we then question whether or not ministers of the gospel should be paid or not?

Could it not be that we devalue their labor? And the sowing of spiritual things. I'm just preaching this because it's here, guys.

It's really awkward for me to preach it. And you guys don't have a problem with this. A lot of churches do. And moreover, you know, scripture itself attests to this truth.

And Paul, that's how Paul clinches his argument. It says in verses 13 to 14, Paul writes, do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?

In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. So whether in Jewish temples or in pagan temples, right, those who serve in those, in making sacrifices, they get the food in the end.

[17 : 24] That's how they make their living. And so Paul uses that to make this argument. And it is important to talk about this because this is an issue that a lot of ministers deal with. I personally know several ministers who are under considerable financial duress and face a lot of family pressures because their churches don't compensate them fairly.

That's not you guys. I'm grateful for that. I mean, it's just, personally, I know this, my dad is one of the pastors, right? He serves a church whose budget is significantly larger than ours, right?

But he gets paid a fraction of what I get paid for the work. And because of that, he, when his teeth are literally falling out, he has to take a loan to go to a dentist. That's not compensating a minister fairly.

That's not godly. It's not idealistic. And he says, in Luke 10, 7, Jesus commends this.

He says, whenever you go out on missionary journeys, remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. That's what Paul's alluding to here in verse 14 when he says, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

[18 : 39] And I agree wholeheartedly that the ministers should not enrich themselves off the gospel. But should we not let them make a living off the gospel? But in spite of the biblical right that ministers have, so that's my first point, support for the gospel, Paul says that he himself does not make use of this right.

That brings us to the second point, sacrifice for the gospel. Paul writes in verse 15, But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision, for I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting.

Paul emphatically denies that he ever demanded to be compensated from them and that he's not writing this to get such provision for himself. He's saying basically, I never took your money and I'm not asking for your money now.

And this issue is so important for Paul, he says, for I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. On the surface, that sounds a little bit like an overreaction, right?

But there's a reason why this is so important for Paul to not get paid for his labors and let's look at that in verse 16. He says, For if I preach the gospel that gives me no ground for boasting, for necessity is laid upon me.

[20 : 01] Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. For Paul, preaching the gospel is not this thing that he chose for himself, it's a necessity laid upon him rather than a choice he made.

And that's because he says, entrusted with a stewardship as he says in verse 17. Paul described himself earlier in chapter 4, verse 1, as a steward of the mysteries of God.

And he refers to that same stewardship. A steward in this context was usually a slave entrusted with managing a household, taking care of the property that he doesn't own himself but that belongs to his owner.

And he considers himself this steward, this slave of Christ, charged with safeguarding and administering the mysteries of God, which is a reference to the salvation plan of God, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And for this reason, Paul does not see his gospel ministry as a profession that he chose, but as an obligation incumbent upon him as a steward. And that's why Paul calls his apostolic ministry a calling.

[21 : 06] He said in the opening greeting of this letter in chapter 1, verse 1, Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I mentioned to you several weeks ago that the word calling is not primarily a vocational term but a relational term.

Like 1 Corinthians 1, 9 says, God is faithful by whom you were called into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Our Christian calling is primarily relational rather than vocational.

It's about our fellowship with the triune God. But because Paul calls, but Paul calls his ministry a calling because his apostolic vocation was part and parcel of his relationship to God as a steward.

Ministry is a calling only because, strictly speaking, it's not a vocation but an extension of one's Christian call, how you relate to God and serve him.

So Paul saw himself as called by God to the ministry. And when the king calls you, you don't vacillate and say, okay, give me a couple weeks and I'll think it over. When the king summons you, it's an authoritative summons.

[22 : 21] You must comply. And that's how Paul thinks about his calling. So his ministry is much more than a job to him. It was a calling for him as a steward of the gospel. So he had no choice but to preach.

So his preaching of the gospel was not something that in his mind that deserved special reward and recognition because it was a necessity for him and that, this should radically challenge the attitude that a lot of ministers are tempted to have.

As ministers, we don't deserve to be put on a pedestal and considered better than everybody else just because we're serving the Lord and preaching the gospel. If you're really called to be a minister, you're doing it as a steward of God.

Don't act like you deserve special recognition for that. You're only doing what is your duty. You're only doing what God's called you to do. It's part of what it means to be a Christian for you to belong to him.

And because of that, Paul says, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. If you don't do it, it's not like you had the choice and you could do it or not. If you don't do it, you will face God's judgment.

[23 : 23] Woe is you. If Paul had preached the gospel and if he had been compensated according to his right as a minister of the gospel, then he would have been an unworthy servant who had only done his duty.

But Paul wants to go above and beyond his call of duty. And so he says in verses 17 to 18, read with me, for if I do this of my own will, I have a reward.

But if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with the stewardship. What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

Paul wants to not make full use of his right in the gospel so that he can do more than his duty, so that he can get a reward. And what is his reward? His reward is that he gets to present the gospel free of charge.

He gets to show people that he preached the gospel not just because he had to but because he wanted to. He gets to show people that he preached the gospel not as a professional, as a means of making a living, but as a Christian who loves God and is living for him.

[24 : 40] That is his reward. That in his, and that's his ground for boasting. His reward or pay is to receive no pay and he would rather die than have anyone deprive him of his ground for boasting.

It would kill him to think that some, that people think that he peddles the gospel for money because the gospel is so much more precious than that because Christ is so much more worthy than that.

So Paul's boasting is not in how great he is but on how great God is. He's boasting in his weakness. He's saying, I have the right to be paid but I voluntarily forego my right and bring myself even lower so that I can lift up Christ and his gospel even higher.

Christ must increase, I must decrease. That's his boasting. Then in verse 19, Paul gives the reason why he took this approach in this ministry. Though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win more of them.

By winning them, Paul doesn't mean gaining their favor or friendship. He means winning them to Christ. That's why later in verse 22, he says that he did this in order to save them. That's what he's talking about.

[25 : 55] And this is Paul's sacrifice for the gospel. He did not make use of his right to win more in the gospel even though he's free from all. He subjected himself to all so that he might save more with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And then in verses 20 to 22, Paul offers three general examples of how he accommodated his behavior to the various social settings he found himself in for the sake of the gospel. And this is really the principle that's been governing his teaching throughout this letter.

And even though the Corinthians despised this, they thought that he was inconsistent. They thought he was a flip-flop. They thought he didn't have a backbone. You keep changing your stance depending on where you are.

Where do you really stand? That was the way Corinthians were assessing him. But Paul insists that he's not compromising the gospel but rather he's contextualizing his behavior for the sake of the gospel.

And this is what he says. Look at verse 20. To the Jews, I became as a Jew in order to win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law though not being myself under the law that I might win those under the law.

[27 : 03] Those under the law is another way to refer to the Jews. And Paul is saying that even though he is no longer bound by the law and no longer subject to its penalties because Christ has fulfilled all the requirements of the law on his behalf that he nevertheless became as one under the law when in the company of other Jews.

So we see an example of this in Acts 16, 1-5. So here Paul takes Timothy who has a Gentile father to be circumcised because there were some Jews who were protesting his presence in their midst.

And he did this so that he could win those Jews over. He contextualized his behavior. He became like a Jew in order to win Jews. And he applied this consistently when he was in the company of Gentiles as well.

He says in verse 21, to those outside the law I became as one outside the law not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ that I might win those outside the law.

We see an example of this in Galatians 2, 1-5. So when Paul was ministering, when he was ministering to the Gentiles, he taught them that they did not need to get circumcised in order to be saved because Christ has fulfilled all the laws of the Old Testament.

[28 : 20] And because that is no longer binding on Christians, that's no longer the way in which you become a Christian, a part of the people of God. As Paul said earlier in chapter 7, verse 19, neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision.

So even though he taught this to Gentiles, so when the Jews who were watching him do this, ministering this way to Gentiles, falsely claimed that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be saved and they pressured Paul to act in that, consistent with that manner, he wrote about it in this way.

He says, we did not yield in submission even for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. Paul refused to circumcise Titus who was a Greek for that reason in that context because the Jews were trying to add to the gospel by saying that if you don't circumcise him, then he will not be saved.

So, exactly the same issue of circumcision, but in one context, he circumcised Timothy for the sake of winning the Jews, but in the other context, he refused to circumcise Titus for the sake of preserving the gospel and saving the Gentiles.

Do you see the two different responses? All for the exact same reason, for the sake of the gospel. Of course, this doesn't mean that Paul ever participates in sin in order to minister to those outside the law, but to make sure that that's clear, Paul adds a parenthetical remark, not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ.

[29 : 52] Christ fulfilled the law, so he's kind of, you could think of it as this, he is like a legend of the map, right, that helps you to make sense of and to read rightly all the different symbols and signs on the map, right?

So, all the institutions and offices and rituals and commandments of the Old Testament find their true meaning and fulfillment in Jesus Christ, so that only by seeing them through the lens of Christ, you can really make sense of them and obey them truly and rightly.

And because Christ has fulfilled it in this way, the law that we are under is no longer that law of the Jews, it's the law of Christ. And the law of Christ is not externally imposed on us like the Jewish laws were, it's internally impelled by the Holy Spirit and it's written on our hearts, as it says in Jeremiah 31.

So, because of that, when he was with Jews, Paul was kosher. When he was with Gentiles, he was not kosher, right? That's basically what he's talking about. And then lastly, Paul adds in verse 22, to the weak, I became weak that I might win the weak.

I become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. To those who have weak consciences, Paul didn't flaunt his freedom or to abuse his rights in their presence, but instead, he became weak like them in order to guard their consciences.

[31 : 13] And all of this he did for what reason? Verse 23, for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings. So far from being a people pleaser, Paul accommodated himself to others out of the love for Christ and out of the fear of God.

There are two ways you can misapply that obviously. This is one way I was going to go at length to explain that, but I'm going to let you discuss that in your community groups because my sermon's long.

But you can misapply that obviously by not being too inflexible and by adding stuff to the gospel and that's not a gospel, or you could be too flexible and you could compromise the gospel.

So you could think about the ways in which that might apply in your lives. And it was for the same reason. So in verse 12, and that's the same reason why Paul also refused compensation from the Corinthians.

It was for the sake of the gospel. So he says in verse 12, nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

[32 : 25] If you translate that more literally, verse 12 says, we endure everything rather than put any obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

So what Paul is saying is this, I would rather endure the greatest hardship myself than to put a slightest obstacle in the way of the gospel.

Paul was a man of single-minded zeal and passion. He was living for Christ and that was his only drive, only thing that counted for him.

But in what ways could receiving compensation from the Corinthians prove to be an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ? In the second letter to the Corinthian church that Paul writes in chapter 11, 7 to 15, Paul gives two specific reasons why he refused compensation.

And the first reason was, quote, to refrain from burdening them in any way. He didn't want to be a financial burden on them lest the Corinthian church be hesitant to host him and to invite him to minister to them.

[33 : 31] Second reason was, quote, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. End quote. By the time Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthian church, there were false apostles who were posing as apostles and they were leading the Corinthian church astray.

And they became apostles, so-called apostles, because they were motivated by greed and the prestige that came with being an apostle. And because they were enriching themselves from the gospel, Paul says that he, in order to distinguish himself from them, he refused to receive any compensation for his gospel labors.

Now, at this point, some of you are wondering why I, along with most of the pastors nowadays, take a salary, if this is the case. Should not we also be concerned for these things?

Honestly, it is a little bit embarrassing for me to preach this to you, because I believe this passage and because it makes me look bad.

And I wish I could forgo my salary, as Paul did, in order not to be a burden to you in any way. I do. I really wish that. I wish, you know, that I could forgo my salary so that people don't think that I'm one of those false ministers who peddle the gospel for money.

[35 : 02] I'm not in this for the money. I would do it for free if I could. But I would have to dramatically scale back my ministry if I were to not take a salary, and I don't think that serves the best interests of our church.

And not only that, I will add that I don't have the gift of celibacy like Paul did. And honestly, I think that helped him. He wasn't married. I mean, I can live on a very tight budget by myself.

It's not the same when you're married. I have a God-given responsibility to not just care for myself, but to care for my family, provide for them, to care for them, and spend time with them.

Apostle Paul didn't have to worry about that. He wrote earlier in chapter 7, 32-34, the unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.

I'm a man of divided interests, and I have to attend to those things. For this reason, I need to make use of my right to be compensated for my ministry.

[36 : 15] But with that in mind, then, in what ways can ministers like myself apply this principle? For one, I try to cultivate the same attitude as that of Paul. For example, I don't see pastoring as a mere job, as a profession, where everything is contractual and transactional.

I don't put all my church relationships and conversations on the clock so that I can be compensated for all the so-called overtime hours. I keep track of my hours to make sure that I don't work less than the 50 hours that I set for myself.

But I never stop working just because, oh, okay, I filled my hours for this week, so all done. Don't have to work anymore. Because I don't do this out of obligation, but out of joy because I love Christ and I love his church.

I also apply this principle in smaller, practical ways. For example, when I put my mind to starting our church here in East Cambridge, our denomination offered me a grant for a one year of church planting internship and one year of church planting residency.

But I knew, starting out, that a fledgling church plant can't sustain a full-time pastor's salary. So for those two years, I also fundraised so that I could stretch those two-year grants to last four years.

[37 : 38] I begged other people for money so that I don't have to be a burden to you. And then now, even now, actually, so my salary, we're small enough still now that most of our money goes out into the operational cost of the church.

Not a single penny from my salary comes from our offerings. It comes from the fundraising. Of course, that will run out eventually. And even in taking a salary, my intention, I assure you, is not to get rich off the gospel.

I just want to make a living for my family. That's why when our eldership set the annual salary, we set it to be below the median household income for Cambridge. I don't say that to earn your pity.

I know that I'm wealthy compared to most people in the world. And we are well supplied. We are not needy. I've never asked for a raise and I never intend to. These are admittedly far smaller sacrifices to make than Apostle Paul did.

And I sincerely regret that I can't make the gospel look as glorious as Apostle Paul did. But I do want you to know that this is something that I'm seeking to apply as a pastor because it applies to me because it's the word of God.

[38 : 54] That's my second point. Sacrifice for the gospel.

Making sacrifices for the gospel is no easy task and it requires discipline and self-control. So knowing this, in the final section of this passage, Paul motivates us with an analogy of an athletic competition.

This is the third point. Self-control for the gospel. In verses 24 to 25, Paul writes, read with me. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run but only one receives the prize?

So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. Paul's not suggesting here that the Christian life is a competition and that only one Christian will receive the prize in the end.

That'd be terrible, wouldn't it? The point of this analogy is not to make us fearful for our fate in the end but to make each of us recognize that there's a prize that awaits us at the end of our lives and we should exert ourselves and run with focus and vigor in order to obtain it.

[40 : 08] This is what Paul has in mind when he says in verse 23, I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings. Paul never took it for granted that he would obtain the salvation stored up for him in the gospel.

He didn't take it for granted. He knew that he had to persevere to the end in order to attain it. Passages of scripture such as Mark 4, 16-17, Hebrews 6, 5-6, 2 Peter 2, 20-22 teach us that it is possible for a professing Christian who checks all the boxes and gives all the evidence of the outward appearance of being saved and having faith could nevertheless fall away from Christ.

This is why perseverance is necessary. The doctrine of perseverance of the saints states that all those who are truly in Christ will be kept by Christ and be saved in the end.

That is a true doctrine and we find it in passages like John 6, 37-44. However, that does not mean that you will be saved regardless of whether you persevere or not.

It means that all true believers will assuredly persevere. So our assurance of salvation is inseparably tied to our perseverance in the faith.

[41 : 29] The more you persevere, the more you will be assured. And the more you are assured in God's grace for you, the more you will persevere in faith and good works.

There's a prize waiting for us in the end. Eternal life, eternal joy, eternal and perfect communion with God. And we must exercise self-control and persevere in order to attain it.

As Jerry Bridges writes in his book *The Discipline of Grace*, we sometimes view the Christian life through the lens of quote, cruise control obedience. He writes this way, we quote, we press the accelerator pedal of obedience until we have brought our behavior up to a certain level or speed.

The level of obedience is most often determined by the behavior standard of other Christians around us. Once we have arrived at this comfortable level of obedience, we push the cruise control button in our hearts.

Ease back and relax. Our particular Christian culture then takes over and keeps us going at the accepted level of conduct. By contrast, consider race car drivers.

[42 : 40] They wouldn't think of using cruise control. They are not interested in blending in with the speed of those around them. They are not out for a Sunday afternoon drive. They want to win the race.

Race car drivers are totally focused on their driving. Their foot is always on the accelerator as they try to push their car to the outer limits of its mechanical ability and endurance.

Christians are not called to cruise for the gospel but to race for the gospel. We are not called to a leisurely jog for the gospel. We are called to a race for the gospel.

Verse 25 tells us, every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we, and imperishable.

The wreath is a reference to the prize of the Olympic Games, which of course were invented by the Greeks to whom Paul is writing. In addition to the Olympic Games, actually there were three other games, pan-Hellenic games that included all the Greek city-states.

[43 : 46] And one of them was actually held in Corinth. So he's probably referring to that. It's called the Isthmian Games. And in the Isthmian Games, the reward for the champion was a pine wreath, which of course because it's made of organic matter, rots.

And Paul's comparing that kind of reward that people strive for with the eternal reward that we have in Christ. We just had the Olympics, the Winter Olympics, right?

Lindsay Vaughn, you guys know who she is? Yeah. I'm a fan. And she just won a bronze medal at Women's Downhill at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. And she's widely considered to be the best race skier, female ski racer of all time.

She has 20 titles, 81 race victories, 135 podium appearances in skiing World Cups. In addition to that, she has seven world championships medals and three Olympic medals.

And she opted to retire after this last Winter Olympics saying that her body, quote, probably can't take another four years. And her sister, Karen Wildo, Kildo, said this about her in an interview with the Washington Post.

[44 : 52] Every single meal she's eaten for the last two years is to build up to this moment. Every single gym workout, every single thing she's done every day for the last eight years has been for this day and those two minutes.

The intensity of focus and dedication that is required to compete as an athlete at the highest level is remarkable, which is why Olympic athletes often break down in tears after a victory as the realization that all the sacrifices they've made day after day, week after week, year after year has finally come into fruition.

If Olympic athletes can dedicate themselves in this way for an earthly medal and temporal honor, should we not dedicate ourselves for that heavenly reward and eternal honor in store for us?

So, Paul continues in verses 26 to 27, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air, but I discipline my body, control, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified.

What kind of a runner enters a race only to wander off course to explore the surroundings? That's funny, right? What kind of a boxer enters the ring only to beat the air?

[46 : 25] He'll get pummeled in seconds and knocked out. We too have an enemy in the ring. The enemies of the soul were all the flesh and the devil and unless we are disciplined and self-controlled, we will get pummeled and knocked out.

Are you living with this gospel urgency? One time, this is very rare, but I was running on the treadmill at a gym and I got too immersed in the book that I was reading and didn't notice that I was slowing down in my run.

I don't even need to tell you what happens next. Of course, I fell off the treadmill and face-planted and our lives are like that, right? There is no neutral ground or still platform.

At every given moment, every decision we make is either bringing us closer to that finish line or driving us further back. The worldly influence, our sinful flesh, and Satan and his minions are always trying to drive us back.

And if you are idle, lackadaisical, you will be carried back and you will not persevere until the end. So Paul says he disciplines his body and keeps it under control.

[47 : 47] The word discipline literally means to beat up, to bruise his body. So he's continuing that athletic metaphor. He's not saying literally we should punish our bodies like ascetics that, you know, flagellate themselves.

That's not what he's saying. He's using the metaphor. Discipline yourself. So let me ask you, what sacrifices can you make?

In what ways can you exercise greater self-control so you can finish this race? Maybe you spend an inordinate amount of time, you know, playing video games or watching TV shows.

Sure, there may be nothing sinful about that, but maybe that's not the best thing you can do with your time. Maybe that's not what an Olympic athlete would do.

Maybe you're not feeding your soul well. Apart from Sunday morning worship, you hardly spend any time with the Lord. A cursory reading of the Bible here and there and a few fleeting moments of prayer here and there.

[49 : 00] Do you have a diet that will nourish your soul? Do you have a regiment that can sustain you, prepare you for that race?

Will people who observe your Christian life see relentlessness, determination, focus, zeal, sacrifice, self-control? or will they see listlessness, laziness, distractedness, and lack of self-control?

But motivating ourselves with guilt will only go so far. It will eventually fail. In order for you to run this race well, you need to see the finish line and what's waiting for you. You need to believe that it's going to be worth all the sacrifices that you make.

And to that end, let me share with you the words of missionary David Livingstone, the famous explorer and missionary who gave his life to reach Africans with the gospel. When he was interviewed about all the great sacrifices he made for Christ, this is how he replied.

He said, quote, people talk of the sacrifice I made, I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice, which is simply acknowledging a great debt we owe to the God which we can never repay?

[50 : 19] Is that a sacrifice which brings its own reward and healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of glorious destiny? It is emphatically no sacrifice.

Rather, it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, danger, forgoing the common conveniences of this life. These may make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink, but let this only be for a moment.

All these are nothing compared with the glory which shall later be revealed in and through us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we are not to talk when we remember the great sacrifice which he made who left his father's throne on high to give himself for us.

Jesus made that sacrifice to run his race for us.

In Hebrews 2, 14 to 18, it teaches that because we are flesh and blood that Jesus had to take on flesh and blood in order to destroy the devil and to free us from slavery to sin and death.

[51 : 35] It says, therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people for because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Christ became like us in our weakness. The eternal spirit took on flesh and blood to save us. the God who cannot be tempted with evil became a man to suffer and be tempted so that he could identify with us, empathize with us and save us.

And the author of Hebrews motivates us with the example of Christ in Hebrews 12 verses 1 to 2. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. Christ ran his race and finished it and the prize waiting for him at the end was his union with the Father pleasing him and doing his will and redeeming the church, us, as a bride for himself.

That was the prize that was waiting for him at the end of his race as we endure the cross for our sake. And for that reason now we endure our race and the prize that waits for us at the end of our race is Christ.

[53 : 14] We get to be united with him. We get to love him and serve him. Amen. So let's subject every aspect of our lives and harness every fiber of our beings for the sake of the gospel.

Please close your eyes with me for a moment. I'm going to take a moment just to be silent and reflect on this message before Dan comes up to lead us in prayer in response to this.

So please take some time to think and reflect and pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.