

March 28, 2021

Is the Gospel Shaping You?

1 Corinthians 9:15-27

The gospel saves, sustains, and *shapes*

When we began Paul's letter to the Corinthians, our basic claim was that in every problem the Corinthians face, Paul *always* commended the gospel to them as the solution. I don't mean that Paul threw **John 3:16** at them like a magic spell and hoped it would change them. Rather, what Paul does is masterfully unpack the gospel and show how it speaks to every single situation you and I face in life. Think of the gospel in three different stages: **1)** the gospel saves us; **2)** the gospel sustains us; and **3)** the gospel shapes us.

1. The gospel saves us

Paul has made it clear that the gospel of Jesus Christ alone is what will *save* sinners from the wrath that is to come. He said in **1:18** "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Now every true Christian understand this: the gospel is what saves us!

2. The gospel sustains us

That brings us to Paul's second essential truth: the gospel is what sustains us. Paul did not start with the gospel and then move on to more advanced doctrines. The gospel is the advanced stuff. He said in **2:2** "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." 'But wait' you say '..didn't Paul preach a lot of other things other than *just* Christ and Him crucified?' No. Everything He preached found it's beginning, middle and end in Christ. The gospel is like the sun in our solar system, every doctrine, every command, every ethic are like the planets revolving around it. The gospel is the center, the solution, the sustaining power to every perplexity you face in life.

How do you fight discouragement? The gospel. “Therefore...we do not lose heart...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us...into his presence” (2 Corinthians 4:14). How do you fight fear? The gospel. “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). Every Christian knows the gospel *saves* them. But many fail to see that the gospel *sustains* them. But the most advanced state of the gospel is what Paul is teaching us this morning.

3. The gospel shapes us

Why can Paul say “I have made myself a servant of all...to the Jews I became as a Jew...to those outside the law I became as one outside the law...to the weak I became weak...I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some?” Why can Paul say that? Because the gospel didn’t *merely* save him or sustain him—it *shaped* Him! Paul was *shaped* by Him who became one of us, by Him who made Himself a servant for us, by Him who became weak for us. Paul’s *very nature*—the core of who he was—was *shaped* by the gospel. He said it like this in **Galatians 2:20** “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” That’s why Paul became all things to all people, because that’s *what Christ did*. Where are you at with the gospel this morning? No doubt you understand the gospel alone *saves* you. Perhaps you even know that the gospel is what *sustains* you. But do you know that the gospel is what is supposed to *shape* you? That’s where Paul is going this morning.

The Big Idea...

The gospel that saves us and sustains us *also shapes us* into a servant to all that we might win more for Jesus' sake

☆How the Gospel Shapes Your Freedom (v.15-18)

☆How the Gospel Shapes Your Slavery (v.19-23)

☆How the Gospel Shapes Your Discipline (v.24-27)

I. How the Gospel Shapes Your Freedom

Free of *even* his own rights

How did the gospel shape Paul? **First** the gospel so freed Paul that he was even free from his own rights. Remember that the Corinthians were so fixated on their own rights—the *right* to eat meat sacrificed to idols—that they were trampling the consciences of their weaker brothers. So Paul turns the tables and says in essence: “look at my rights.” Then he gave six arguments for why apostles and pastors deserve wages. But shockingly he is not using these rights. Look at v.15 “But I have made no use of any of these rights, **nor am** I writing these things to secure any such provision.” Paul’s argument was so compelling that no doubt some of the Corinthians thought this was an attempt to secure wages from them, but he says absolutely not! End of v.15 “For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of *my ground for boasting*.” Most often *boasting* in Scripture is sinful and arrogant. But here Paul means *reveling* or *rejoicing*. In other words, Paul has a ground—a reason—to revel or rejoice (to boast) precisely because he preaches the gospel *without accepting payment* from the Church. This is his first example of denying himself, of being free from what is due to him.¹

In my heart there is a burning fire

Then he says in v.16 “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me.” Stop. Why did Paul preach? Necessity was laid upon him. God sovereignly called him to be a preacher.

¹ Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Published by Forgotten Books 2012, Originally Published 1885), pg. 234

When he was on the road to Damascus, the Lord Jesus Christ blinded him with Heavenly light and told Paul that he would now be working for a new Master. **Acts 9:6** “...enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” Paul was compelled into service. This was a settled reality before he was even born. **Galatians 1:15** “..he who had set me apart before I was born...called me by his grace.” Paul realized this and said at the end of v.16 “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” When the prophet Jeremiah considered quitting his calling as a preacher, he said in **Jeremiah 20:9** “If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.” Likewise Paul recognized that there was an inward, spiritual, invisible, Divine compulsion that drove him, and he would come undone if he were to refuse it.² As John MacArthur says “At some time or another, every preacher whom the Lord has called will realize that he is under God’s compulsion.”

‘I had no choice’

v.17 “For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward.” Stop. Paul is giving a hypothetical: ‘*If I called my self into this ministry, then I could boast in that.*’ But he didn’t call himself. Halfway through v.17 “...but if not of my own will [in other words, *if it was God who called me*—which is the case, *then*], I am still entrusted with a stewardship.” You see, “It was not [Paul’s] choice to serve Christ”³ Yes He served Jesus willing and cheerfully, but He was obligated to do this. Preaching the gospel was his *stewardship*—and he could not boast on those grounds. As Jesus said in **Luke 17:10** “So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

² “It is not that God’s calling cannot be ignored, neglected, or slighted, but it that it cannot be changed. The man who resists God’s call or tries to give it up will, like Jeremiah, experience a “burning fire shut up in [his] bones” until he obeys. He has no choice.” John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 209-210

³ *Ibid*, pg. 210

The reward of preaching for free

So then he asks in **v.18** “What then is my reward?”—‘What is my boast? What can I revel and rejoice in?’ “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.” To clarify, Paul is saying ‘I can’t glory or boast in my preaching the gospel, for I am obligated to do that. But I can glory in preaching the gospel without payment, for I am under no obligation to preach without charge.’ You see that is his reward!

Paul’s method was shaped by the gospel

His very method of preaching the gospel was *shaped* by the gospel itself. “Paul’s reward was to sacrifice himself for others.”⁴ Nobody could claim that he was preaching *merely* for money. Nobody could hold up an ulterior motive and say: *...aba* this is why you are *really* preaching, because you personally benefit from it.’ No he didn’t. He gained *nothing* from the Corinthians except reproach and abuse. Just like the Lord Jesus Christ. What did Jesus gain when He came into the world? What did we have to offer Him? Nothing. In fact, it cost Him to come into the world. It cost Him his reputation, His comfort, even His very blood. That’s why the gospel is the most unspeakably beautiful thing you can conceive. Because this God-man loved us, though all we gave Him was our sin and shame. Paul was so shaped by this gospel that he refused very payment *that was due to him*, so that he could illustrate, embody, and clarify this gospel.⁵ He didn’t want their money, *he wanted them*. He said in **2 Corinthians 12:15** “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.”

⁴ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 163

⁵ Acts 20: 33-35 “I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

1st principle: Our freedom is a currency to buy gospel clarity

So we arrive at our **first principle**: *You can use your freedom as currency to buy gospel clarity.* Yes Paul had rights. But he *freely* chose not to exercise them. Paul labored for free because He already had everything he needed or wanted or could conceive in Jesus *Himself*. Jesus gave Himself to Paul freely without conditions and his method was the same. He gave himself freely to the Corinthians without conditions. In doing so, he made the gospel more clear. Beloved, how you exercise your rights and freedoms will either make the gospel more clear or more obscure. Let's test ourselves. Paul was applying this to relationships in the Church. Are your relationships in the Church shaped by the gospel or by the world? Do you love others *because* of what you can get out of them? Are your relationships mercenary-based? Jesus put it like this in **Luke 14:12-14** "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and *you be repaid*. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, *because they cannot repay you*. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." Are you looking to get *repaid* in your relationships? Are you insistent on exercising what you think are your rights? If so, then your relationships are not being shaped by the gospel. Jesus died for you when you were still a sinner, still ungodly, still his enemy. He came to you when you offered Him nothing. Is that how you love others? Freely, without expecting payment? That's our **first point**. The gospel is meant to shape the way we use our freedoms and exercise our rights with others.

II. How the Gospel Shapes Your Slavery

A slave to every failure

How did the gospel shape Paul? It shaped him into the form of a slave. Look at v.19 "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them." Though the Son had set Paul free, though he

was free from the law, free from the opinions and traditions of men, he made himself a δουλόω *douloō* a slave of all. He put himself under the bondage of others—spiritually speaking, so that he might win more of them. Meaning win more of them to Christ, to salvation. Now some have used this passage as purely as a missionary text. This is how you should do mission work. And certainly it can and should be used for that. However Paul was not commending this philosophy of life to the Corinthians as how to deal with outsider, but how to deal with each others. And as we will see, Paul applied this philosophy to Christians and non-Christians alike.

To the Jews...to those under the law

Let's begin with **v.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." He's talking about the same group here, the Jew is the person under the law, meaning the ceremonial laws of Israel. Here he says 'I will become just like them—under that law—if it means I can win them.' Let's turn to Acts 16 to see how this plays out. We saw a couple weeks ago in **Acts 15** that the Jerusalem council had written the Gentiles that they did not have to get circumcised in order to be saved. The Judaizers were dead wrong. But look here in **Acts 16:1-3** "Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him *and circumcised him because of the Jews* who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." This is remarkable! The Jerusalem Council of which Paul was a part of said circumcision was not necessary for salvation, *but Paul circumcised Timothy anyway!* Why? Because they would be visiting Jews who weren't ready to accept that circumcision was done away with, and if he showed up with an uncircumcised Timothy they would not listen to his gospel.

Timothy vs. Titus

But isn't Paul contradicting himself? Paul had told the Galatians in **Galatians 5:3** "I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law." In fact, in Galatians Paul refused to circumcise Titus though the Jews asked him. He said in **2:5** in "...we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you." To circumcise Titus would have been to abandon the gospel. But he circumcised Timothy so that the Jews would hear the gospel. How do we reconcile this?

Indifference vs. necessity

Here was Paul's rule: When it came to matters of indifference Paul always surrendered, but when it came to matters of necessity Paul never surrendered.⁶ What are matters of indifference? Theologians call these things adiaphora. Adiaphora are things that will not commend us to God nor condemn before God. Paul already laid down this principle in **1 Corinthians 8:8** in regards to food: "Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do." Circumcision is a matter of adiaphora, an indifferent thing, because God doesn't command it nor forbid it. So Paul was able to circumcise Timothy because he knew it meant nothing to God. But he refused to circumcise Titus because the Judaizers were making it a matter of necessity for salvation. If Paul surrendered to them, he would be conceding the point.

Circumcision as currency

Back to the point. Paul already made it clear that the gospel has set us free from the ceremonial law.⁷ He said in **1 Corinthians 7:19** "For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision..." But these Jews in Acts 16 didn't understand that—they were not yet acquainted with the freedom that

⁶ "No one was more yielding in matters of indifference, no one was more unyielding in matters of principle than this apostle." Hodge, pg. 163-164

⁷ That's why he makes it clear in v.20: "...though not being myself under the law."

Jesus had won. So Paul and Timothy became their slaves, and used circumcision as a currency to purchase them as listeners.

To those outside the law

But it wasn't to Jews only that Paul became a slave for the sake of the gospel. Look at v.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." Paul is talking about Gentiles, to them he became as one outside the law, but he qualifies it—*not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ*—meaning he didn't practice the ceremonial law of the Jews when with them. But He is quick to say that he was always under God's moral law—the ten commandments—summed up by Christ to love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself.⁸ So what did this look like? Well remember when Paul preached in Athens at Mars Hill in Acts 17? Athens was the beating heart of Greece, "the most noted place in the whole world for learning, [and] philosophy."⁹ He made his way to the Areopagus where all the learned men of the city gathered. How did he preach? His speech is very different from other places. He didn't immediately start with Jesus Christ, or the Torah, but with their own so-called gods. He reasons according to the book of nature and he even quotes some of their pagan poets and philosophers (v.28). Then he transitions to the true nature of God and the judgment to come and the resurrection of Christ as proof of it all. Paul used philosophical reasoning, and adjusted his style and arrangement: "To the wise he became as wise, that he might gain the wise."¹⁰ He never changed the message of the gospel. But he contextualized his customary way of speaking in order to have his gospel heard.

⁸ Mark 12:30-31

⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 190

¹⁰ *Ibid*

To the weak

The last group Paul mentions are the weak. And here he means weak Christians. v.22 “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak.” Please turn with me to Acts 21. Here Paul is returning to Jerusalem from his missionary journey, and the elders meet him. After he gives a report of what God had done among the Gentiles, they say to him halfway through v.20 “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews *of those who have believed* [notice these are *Jewish believers*]. They are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. What then is to be done?” So they instruct Paul to take a Nazirite vow—part of the ceremonial law¹¹—with some other men, in order to demonstrate to these weaker brothers that Paul was not an apostate. Paul agrees to do this. Why? Because it was *adiaphora*—a matter of indifference. As F.F. Bruce said “A truly emancipated spirit such as Paul’s [was] not in bondage to its own emancipation.”¹² ‘BUT weren’t these Jewish believers wrong about the importance of the ceremonial law?’ Yes, but they weren’t Judaizers, otherwise Paul would have never compromised.¹³ They were weak brothers, not yet ready or able to come into the full freedom of the gospel. ‘BUT wasn’t Paul nourishing a false confidence in the ceremonial laws?’ No more than what the Jerusalem council did in Acts 15 when they told the Gentiles to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols.¹⁴

¹¹ cf. Numbers 6:9-13

¹² F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), pg.432

¹³ I think this is demonstrated by his refusal to compromise in the book of Galatians

¹⁴ For a wonderful exposition of this text, see John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XIX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 277-282

2nd principle: We ought to be slaves in matters of indifference

So we come to our **second principle**: *We ought to become slaves in matters of indifference in order to win others to the gospel.* That's Paul's conclusion. Halfway through v.22 in **1 Corinthians 9**: "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. *I do it all for the sake of the gospel*, that I may share with them in its blessings." Paul *does not* say "I do it all for the sake of *not offending people.*" Paul was beat and flogged and imprisoned more than any other Apostle. Why? Because he offended a lot of people. There is a erroneous thought in Evangelicalism today that insists that we must not offend the culture, and there are winsome police everywhere writing citations for said violations. Now it's true that we must not needlessly offend, that's sinful, and a bad witness of the gospel.¹⁵ But if we are going to stand for the gospel *faithfully*, the culture will be offended.¹⁶ Judaizers will be offended, whether they be religious Judaizers or political Judaizers. Paul's *main goal* is *not* avoiding offense. His main goal was to win others to the gospel. And he willing becomes a slave in all matters of indifference to do so, becoming all things to all people, "...accommodating himself to their prejudices that he might win them over to better views."¹⁷

¹⁵ "When we have done our utmost, there will be opposition enough to vital religion, against which the carnal mind of man has such an enmity. We should not therefore needlessly increase and raise that enmity. The apostle, though he took so much pains to please men, had persecution almost every where raised against him. A fisherman is careful not needlessly to ruffle and disturb the water, lest he should drive the fish away from his net; but he will rather endeavour if possible to draw them into it. Such a fisherman was the apostle, 2 Cor. xii. 15, 16. "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you." <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works1.ix.v.ii.html?scrBook=1Cor&scrCh=9&scrV=19#ix.v.ii-p19.2>

¹⁶ I'm afraid that many evangelicals believe that John MacArthur in California and James Coates in Canada violated this passage and brought disrepute on the gospel because they refused to obey the government. But I would submit to you that they were perfectly in line with Paul's doctrine. What happened in Californian and Canada were not matters of indifference. They did what they did for the sake of the gospel—which is what Paul actually said. For them, this was a question of Lordship: who is Lord over the Church: Christ or Caesar? They refused to compromise with the political Judaizers of our day. Paul does not say "To the tyrannical I make myself subject."

¹⁷ Hodge, pg. 166

Is your witnessing shaped by the gospel?

So test yourselves loved ones. **First**, ask yourself, is it your goal to win more people to the gospel, both weaker Christians and non-Christians alike? Seven times in this passage, Paul says it was his goal to win, to win, to save, to share. Is that your goal, to win as many people to Christ as you can? Is that your actual practice? It's one thing to theoretically agree that Christians should win others to Christ, but your practice is the real test of your convictions.¹⁸ Do you make it a practice to engage in the gospel with others? **Secondly**, has the gospel shaped your witness? Meaning, do you bear with the failings of others, making yourself a slave to their shortcomings, subjecting yourself to their prejudices, so that you can win them to better views? Paul said in **Romans 15:1-3** "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." Christ did not please Himself, because He desired your salvation. Do you desire other's salvation enough that you will die to your own desires? That's our **second point**. The gospel is meant to shape the way we share the gospel. We ought to be slaves in non-essential matters so we can win more.

¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards said: "Practice also is the proper evidence of Christian fortitude. The trial of a good soldier is not in his chimney corner, but in the field of battle; 1 Cor. ix. 25 26. 2 Tim. ii. 3-5. And as the fruit of holy practice is the chief evidence of the truth of grace; so the degree in which experiences have influence on a person's practice, is the surest evidence of the degree of that which is spiritual and divine in his experiences. Whatever pretenses persons may make to great discoveries, great love and joys, they are no further to be regarded, than they have influence on their practice." <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works1.vii.iv.xv.html?scrBook=1Cor&scrCh=9&scrV=25#vii.iv.xv-p47.1>

III. How the Gospel Shapes Your Discipline

Disciplined so that he would win

How did the gospel shape Paul? It shaped Paul into the most self-disciplining, self-denying, athlete whose only goal was to win the prize. Please look at v.24 “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.” “The Greeks had two great athletic festivals, the Olympic games and the Isthmian games.”¹⁹ The Isthmian games were held at Corinth every third summer, and people from all over Greece would come to participate and watch. These were the greatest contests in the ancient world—to win was to be immortalized with the highest honors mortal man can give. Even the Roman competed in these games.²⁰ The allusion Paul is making is clear, the Christian life *in one vital sense* is just like these games.²¹ Here’s the one command Paul gives in passage: ‘Run that you may win.’ How do you win? v.25 “Every athlete exercises self-control in *all things*.”

The wrestler

When I was a wrestler in high school, my dad would drive me at 6am during wrestling season to the gym. I would put my plastic suit on, dress up like an eskimo and then run, run and run some more. It was pre-Pearl Jam so I listened to a lot of Bon Jovi on my little walkman lap after lap. But I won a lot of matches. My name is still written on the wall in the wrestling room. But those victories cost me dearly. I got poked in the eye more times than I can remember, had to get one surgery, got cauliflower ear so bad it hurt to touch the side of my

¹⁹ MacArthur, pg. 214

²⁰ Hodge, pg.167

²¹ “There is, however, this difference between our contest and theirs, that among them only one is victorious, and obtains the palm—the man who has got before all the others; but our condition is superiors in this respect, that there may be many at the same time. For God requires from us nothing more than that we press on vigorously until we reach the goal. Thus one does not hinder another: nay more, those who run in the Christian race are mutually helpful to each other.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 308

head. So strenuous were those years, that I still have nightmares about having to cut weight for a tournament. But if I would have insisted on my liberties and my rights—to eat what I wanted, to sleep when I wanted—I would have lost.

A crown of leaves vs. a crown of gold

That's Paul's point here. The Corinthians refused to limit their liberties and exercise self control with their rights, therefore they were losing their testimony, they were losing their ability to witness, they were losing their ability to win others to better views of the gospel. Paul makes a lesser to greater argument: 'if these olympiads are so self-disciplines over temporal things, shouldn't we be all the more?' Look at the end of v.25 "They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." The victor of the games would receive a "...wreath of olive or garland of pine leaves."²² They would train years for a crown of leaves that would start fall apart and rot in just a few days. But what does the Lord offer His beloved? Immortal, unfading crowns of righteousness. **2 Timothy 4:8** "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."

He strained every nerve and every sinew

So Paul says in v.26 "So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air." How many Christians are like this today? They have lost sight of what the Christian life is. Imagine a runner after he completes his fifth lap, he forgets he's in a race and so runs off in the woods. Have you forgotten you are in a race? The NT shows us a Paul who never forgot this fact. He says in v.27 "But I discipline my body²³ and keep it under control lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." Paul wasn't afraid of losing his salvation, you can't. He was concerned that he would be disqualified *from being an effective*

²² Hodge, 168

²³ In the Greek, it is literally "I give my self a black eye." He bruised his own body for the cause of Christ.

witness, so everything he did, he assured that wouldn't happen.²⁴ Jonathan Edwards says this about him:

“He lost all...when great sufferings were in the way, he willingly made himself conformable to Christ's death, that he might have a part in his resurrection. He parted with his honor, his ease, his former friends and former acquaintance, his worldly goods and every thing else, and plunged himself into a state of extreme labour, contempt, and suffering; and in this way he sought the kingdom of heaven. He acted in this matter very much as one that is running a race for some great prize, who makes running his great

²⁴ This was essentially Calvin's view of this verse, although others have different understandings of it. Edwards says here: “That they who once truly believe in Christ, never fall away finally and perish, is evident, because they that now believe not, and are in a state of condemnation, are spoken of as those that never have believed, John iii. 18. “Because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.” Which supposes, that none of those that have believed, are now unbelievers, or are now in a state of condemnation. So again, those who shall be condemned at the day of judgment, are represented as those, not only whom Christ then will know not, but as those whom he never knew, Matt. vii. 23. But how can this be a true representation, if some of them were once true Christians, and so were known and owned by Christ, but only have since apostatized? “When St. Paul kept under his body lest he should be a castaway, 1 Cor. ix. 27. he did no otherwise than he was wont to do in temporal concerns, in cases wherein he was beforehand certain of the event. So he sent word to the chief captain of the Jews lying in wait to kill him, lest he should be murdered by them, though it was revealed to him from God, but the very night before, that he should live to see Rome; Acts xxiii. 12-21. So he would not allow the sailors to leave the ship. &c. Bellamy's True Religion, Disc. 1. Inference 9. 1 John iii. 6. “Whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him.” This could not be true, if a man who has truly seen him, and known him, might finally fall away to sin. As to scripture cautions against falling away, lest it should issue in damnation; we may observe that God had been pleased to connect eternal life with eating the fruit of the tree of life; and therefore, although it was utterly impossible that Adam should have eternal life in himself, after he had fallen, as God's peremptory declaration and unalterable constitution had made it impossible; yet we are told, that after the fall, God placed cherubims and a flaming sword to keep the way of the tree of life, lest the man should put forth his hand, and take and eat of the fruit of the tree, and live for ever. So God has connected damnation with living in allowed sin, and being overcome by sin, and brought under its power. And therefore, although it be impossible, that men, after they are once truly converted, should ever perish, yet they are warned against falling away and yielding to the power of sin, lest they should perish: and the apostle Paul kept under his body, lest he should be a cast-away.” Edwards, pg. 602

and only business, until, he has reached the end of the race, and strains every nerve and sinew, and suffers nothing to divert him...but presses forward."²⁵

The gospel shaped him

Beloved do you see how the gospel shaped Paul? Why did he do all these things? Because that's what Christ did. His whole life was spent denying Himself *for our sake*. We were under the power of the prince of darkness. So what did He do? He *denied* Himself all the pleasures of Heaven and came into the world to make war with the beast. But the only way Jesus could defeat Satan was to succeed where Adam failed. So He *denied* Himself His own throne above the stars, and clothed Himself in all the weaknesses of human flesh. We were bound with the chains of sin and death. No one could subdue us, least of all ourselves. So what did He do? He *denied* Himself the infinite sovereign freedom of being God and He removed our chains and placed them on Himself. He *denied* Himself the reward of righteousness, and became the object of sin for us. We hated God and were His enemies. What did He do? He *denied* Himself the friendship of the Father, and became forsaken by Him. He *denied* Himself every path to rescue. Who was holding together the men who nailed Him to the cross? One author said "So completely was Jesus bent upon saving sinners by the sacrifice of Himself, He created the tree upon which He was to die, and nurtured from infancy the men who were to nail him to the accursed wood."²⁶ As the old hymn goes.

To the howling mob He yielded; He did not for mercy cry.
The cross of shame He took alone.
And when He cried, "It's finished," He gave Himself to die;
Salvation's wondrous plan was done.

²⁵ Source: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works2.xv.v.html?scrBook=1Cor&scrCh=9&scrV=26#xv.v-p20.2>

²⁶ Octavius Winslow

He could have called ten thousand angels
 To destroy the world and set Him free.
 He could have called ten thousand angels,
 But He died alone, for you and me.²⁷

We win by dying

Do you see? “[Jesus won] not by conquering but by dying, not by bringing the sword but by bearing the cross.”²⁸ Beloved that’s how we win, by dying. That’s how the gospel must shape witness. If the God-man died for us, it is gross ungratefulness that we not be willing to die to ourselves for others. Dear congregation, are you willing to forfeit liberties and rights—things that are owed you—so that weak Christians, so that non-Christians might meet the Savior? “A Christian can’t expect to witness well without a tremendous amount of effort...”²⁹ Are you willing to deny your own desires, your own fleshly thoughts, your honor, your reputation, your desire for possessions, your comfort so that you might save some? Is it your goal “...to win as many people to Jesus Christ as possible by any means possible?”³⁰ Paul said in **Acts 20:24** “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

If you are not a Christian, consider what this great God has done to win you to Himself...

²⁷ <http://www.hymnalaccompanist.com/Story/Ten%20Thousand%20Angels.html>

²⁸ Stephen T. Um, *1 Corinthians: The WORD of the CROSS, Preaching the Word*, Series Editor R. Kent Hughes, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2015), pg. 176

²⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 174

³⁰ MacArthur, pg. 215